NATION

India: Why is UNSC ineffective in Russia-Ukraine war

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Markets recover with Sensex gaining 305 pts

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

BCCI Ranji diktat is potential savior: Rohit Sharma

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈہ روزنامہ بنگلور

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5,000 aspirants get job offer letters after govt fair ends

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

After the two-day job mela Yuba Samriddhi Sammelana, the Karnataka Skill Development Corporation claimed that around 5,000 offer letters were given by companies that participated in the job fair. According to the department, 20,000 of the 86,000 participants, were engineering graduates. However, some students and companies returned with disappointment. Many students failed to find jobs that would match with their skills and many companies failed to find candidates matching with the industrial standards. Graduates across the State took part in the mela seeking jobs.
—Salar News

UP court asks police to arrest Jaya Prada, produce her before it

RAMPUR, 27 FEB

A court in Rampur in Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday declared former MP and actor Jaya Prada as an "absconder" in connection with two cases of election code violations and directed the police to arrest her and produce her before it on 6 March. According to senior prosecution officer Amarnath Tiwari, two cases were registered against the former MP from Rampur at Kemari and Swar police stations for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. The actor was a BJP candidate from Rampur in the 2019 polls and was defeated by Azam Khan of Samajwadi Party. Subsequently, non-bailable warrants were issued against her seven times, but the police could not produce her before the court.
—PTI

CUET-UG starts application for exam in hybrid mode

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG will be conducted in hybrid mode from 15-31 May in two or three shifts per day and the results will be announced on 30 June, National Testing Agency (NTA) announced on Tuesday. The crucial exam for admission to undergraduate programmes will be conducted in 13 languages at centers in 380 cities including 26 cities abroad. The application process began on Tuesday and will conclude on 26 March. "For the Academic Session 2024-25, CUET (UG) 2024 will be conducted in the hybrid mode. The decision to conduct the exam as a Computer-Based Test or in pen-and-paper mode will lie with NTA which will decide considering multiple factors," a NTA official said. *—PTI*

Centre extends ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, J&K, for 5 years

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The government on Tuesday extended the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, Jammu and Kashmir, for five more years for continuing activities against the security, integrity, and sovereignty of the nation, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said. He also said that anyone threatening the security of the nation will face ruthless measures. "Pursuing PM @ narendramodi Ji's policy of zero tolerance against terrorism and separatism the government has extended the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, Jammu Kashmir for five years," he wrote on 'X'. The home minister said the organisation is found continuing its activities against the security, and sovereignty of the nation. *—PTI*

Congress wins 3 seats, BJP 1 in K'taka RS polls

Maken, Chandrasekhar, Hussain, Bhandage are winners

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Congress won three seats and BJP one in the Rajya Sabha elections in Karnataka on Tuesday, which were marred by cross-voting in a setback to the saffron party.

Ajay Maken, GC Chandrasekhar and Syed Naseer Hussain, all from Congress, and Narayana Krishnasa Bhandage (BJP) got elected to the Upper House.

Five candidates, including D Kupendra Reddy of JD(S) who lost the election, were in the fray for the four seats. BJP MLA ST Somashekar voted for Maken, while another party legislator A Shivaram Hebbar abstained.

BJP said it was exploring the possibility of taking legal action them and lodging a complaint with the Speaker UT Khader seeking their disqualification from the Assembly for violating the whip issued to them to vote in favour of the party candidate. Somashekar had earlier quit Congress and joined BJP. He and Hebbar had in fact distanced themselves from BJP in recent months, and increasingly began identifying with Congress.

Syed Naseer Hussain, GC Chandrasekhar, DK Shivakumar and Ajay Maken after winning Rajya Sabha polls at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP (66 MLAs) and JD(S) (19 MLAs) combined had fielded Kupendra though they did not have the requisite votes to get him elected. NDA partners said they were expecting "conscience votes", apparently from the rival Congress camp, in favour of Reddy. Somashekar said he heard the "voice of his conscience" and voted in favour of the Congress, "which built schools and carried out developmental works in his constituency". Hebbar too abstained from voting adhering to his conscience, he said. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah hit out at JD(S), alleging that the party sought to lure and threaten its MLAs.

"An FIR has been lodged regarding the threat to us," he said. Former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy said the FIR against Kupendra and his aides was registered at Vidhana Soudha police station.
—PTI/ANI

>>>More on Page 2

Big upset for Himachal Cong as BJP wins RS poll

LUCKNOW, 27 FEB

In a stunning upset for the ruling Congress in Himachal Pradesh, the BJP on Tuesday won the state's lone Rajya Sabha seat with its candidate Harsh Mahajan defeating Congress stalwart Abhishek Manu Singhvi. This has set the stage for a no-trust motion in the Assembly.

Himachal Pradesh saw cross voting that led to the victory of BJP candidate. Mahajan was declared winner by draw of lots after both the candidates were tied, securing 34 votes each. The result made it clear that nine MLAs voted in favour of the BJP. At present, the Congress has 40 MLAs, BJP 25 while three are independents in the 68-member Himachal Pradesh assembly.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu alleged five to six Congress MLAs were "kidnapped" and whisked away by CRPF and Haryana police.

There was also a buzz that if Congress nominee fails to make it to Rajya Sabha, BJP could move a no-trust motion against Sukhu government in the Assembly.
—PTI

>>>More on Page 3

RAPS CENTRE

SC issues contempt notice to Patanjali over 'misleading ads'

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The entire country has been "taken for a ride", the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while restraining till further orders Patanjali Ayurved, a company co-founded yoga guru Ramdev and dealing in herbal products, from advertising or branding products meant for treating diseases.

Issuing notices to Patanjali Ayurved and managing director Acharya Balkrishna, the Supreme Court asked why contempt proceedings should not be initiated against them for prima facie violating the firm's undertaking given in the court about advertising of its products and their medicinal efficacy.

A bench of justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah also cautioned the company and its officers against making any media statements, both in print and electronic, against any system of medicine in any form as stated in their undertaking on 21 November last year.

The top court had then cautioned the company against making false and misleading claims in advertisements **PHOTO: PTI**

The top court is hearing a plea of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) alleging a smear campaign by Ramdev against the vaccination drive and modern medicines.

The top court had then cautioned the company against making "false" and "misleading" claims in advertisements about its medicines as cure of several diseases. It said that till further orders, Patanjali Ayurved will be restrained from advertising or branding of products which are specified as diseases, disorders or conditions in the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954.
—PTI

DEADLINE FOR KANNADA BOARDS ENDS TODAY

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

As the deadline for implementing 60 per cent Kannada on name boards of commercial establishments and others gets over by Wednesday, signage makers in the City and traditional painting board makers are experiencing a surge in demand. However, some establishments are apprehensive that pro-Kannada activists may still remove signage boards despite compliance after a viral video on social media showed signage boards of a clothing establishment being removed, despite featuring a Kannada name.

As the clock ticks, private establishments are rushing to signage board makers to ensure compliance with the new rules by the government. "I observe a variety of customers coming in for modifications," a signage board maker in Girinagar, who has been in Bengaluru for over 20 years in the business, told Salar News.
—Salar News

>>>More on Page 2

MODI'S KERALA TOUR

PM reveals names of 4 Gaganyaan astronauts

Astronauts-designate Shubanshu Shukla, Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair, Ajit Krishnan and Angad Prathap for the 'Gaganyaan Mission', India's first crewed mission to the space **PHOTO: PTI**

T'PURAM, 27 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Tuesday the names of the four astronauts who will be part of India's first human space flight programme, Gaganyaan, slated to be launched in 2024-25.

The four chosen Indian Air Force pilots are Group Captain Prashanth Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap, and Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla.

Gp Capt Nair was born in Kerala in 1976 and is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, and also a recipient of the 'Sword of Honour' -- an honour given to the best all-round cadet -- at the Air Force Academy, an IAF spokesperson said.

Modi, reviewed the progress of Gaganyaan mission and bestowed 'astronaut wings' to the astronaut-designates at Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre. Modi hailed the astronauts as "four forces" representing the aspirations of India's 140 crore people. Modi expressed immense satisfaction that the majority of components for the Gaganyaan mission are manufactured in India.

"India's success in the space sector is sowing the seeds of scientific temperament in the country's young generation," Modi said. "This mission is also going to take our space sector to a new height."

As per ISRO, Gaganyaan project envisages demonstration of human space-flight capability by launching crew of three members to an orbit of 400 km for a three days mission and bring them back safely to earth, by landing in Indian sea waters.

The pre-requisites for Gaganyaan mission include development of many critical technologies including human rated launch vehicle for carrying crew safely to space, Life Support System to provide an earth like environment to crew in space and many more.

Various precursor missions are planned for demonstrating the Technology Preparedness Levels before carrying out the actual Human Space Flight mission. These demonstrator missions include Integrated Air Drop Test, Pad Abort Test and Test Vehicle flights. Safety and reliability of all systems will be proven in unmanned missions preceding manned mission. Human safety is of paramount importance in Gaganyaan mission.
—ANI/PTI

Lena says she is Gaganyaan pilot's wife

T'Puram, 27 Feb

Malayalam actor Lena on Tuesday revealed on her Instagram that she has been married to Indian Air Force Fighter Pilot Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi named him as one of the four astronauts undergoing training for the groundbreaking Gaganyaan mission here. The 'Sneham' actor also shared a photograph of her and Nair posing with the ISRO Chairman S Somanath. In a post on the social media platform, she said she was waiting for this significant announcement to let everybody know that she had tied the knot with Nair through an arranged marriage on 17 January. *—PTI*

Lena with husband Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair **PHOTO: LENAA/INSTAGRAM**

Pilots trained at Rakesh Sharma's Russian Center

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The four astronauts who will be part of India's first human space flight program, Gaganyaan, were trained at the Yuri Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Centre (GCTC) in Russia, the same centre where Rakesh Sharma underwent training. Rakesh Sharma was the first Indian to go into space in 1984. The centre offers high-tech training facilities, including integrated simulators. It also offers survival training for many possible landing situations, including mountains, woodlands, marshes, deserts, in the Arctic and on the sea. *—ANI*

Narendra Modi during his visit to the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), in Thiruvananthapuram, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Farmers' stir: Internet shut in Haryana again

CHANDIGARH, 27 FEB

Haryana government on Tuesday announced that mobile internet services and bulk SMS will remain suspended at certain places in Ambala district from 28 February to 29 February given the ongoing farmers' "Delhi Chalo" agitation.

The services were suspended in Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad, and Sirsa on 11 February and the suspension was extended on 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 23 February.

Meanwhile, farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher on Tuesday said several meetings were held with Samyukta Kisan Morcha over the issue of 'Delhi Chalo' call but it was not in favour of the march to the national capital.

Pandher said this while responding to SKM's claims in the media that it was neither invited nor consulted before deciding about the 'Delhi Chalo' call. SKM had spearheaded the 2020-21 farmers' agitation against the now-repealed farm laws.

Pandher said they wanted 'Delhi Chalo' agitation to be held in November last year but it got delayed as SKM did not want the agitation to be held.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha are spearheading 'Delhi Chalo' agitation to put pressure on Centre to accept their demands, including a law on MSP for crops and farm loan waiver. *—PTI*

BJP'S MAJOR POLL PROMISE

'CAA rules to be out before Model Code of Conduct'

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The rules for the implementation of the contentious Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) for fast-tracking citizenship to undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are likely to be issued before the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections comes into effect.

The MCC gets enforced immediately after election schedule is announced, which is likely in next fortnight. When the rules for the CAA are issued, the Modi government will start granting Indian citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim migrants -- Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians -- from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who had come to India till 31 December, 2014.

Ministry of Home Affairs has readied a portal for the convenience of the applicants as the entire process will be online **PHOTO: PTI**

The Ministry of Home Affairs has readied a portal for the convenience of the applicants as the entire process will be online. The applicants will have to declare the year when they entered India without travel documents. No document will be sought from the applicants, an official said.

The CAA was passed in December 2019. There were massive protests in some parts of the country after this incident. At least 100 people lost their lives during the protests or police action.

- On 27 December, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said that no one can stop the implementation of the CAA and accused the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of misleading people on the issue.

On 27 December, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said that no one can stop the implementation of the CAA and accused the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of misleading people on the issue.

According to the Manual on Parliamentary Work, the rules for any legislation should have been framed within six months of presidential assent or seek extension from the Committees on Subordinate Legislation in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

According to the annual report of the Ministry of Home Affairs for 2021-22, from 1 April, 2021 to 31 December, 2021, a total of 1,414 foreigners belonging to these non-Muslim minority communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan were given Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Act, 1955. *—PTI*

Uttara Kannada to revive INS Chappell warship

KARWAR, 27 FEB

Uttara Kannada administration has announced plans to refurbish the iconic INS Chappell warship, which served the nation's defence for 29 years. The Russian-built warship was stationed at the Visakhapatnam Naval Base in 1976, and retired in 2005. It was housed in Karwar's Tagore beach. However, neglect over the years has led to the ship's deterioration. The administration is investing Rs 45 lakh to restore the vessel to its original glory. The warship weighs 375 tonnes and is equipped with four missiles and two aircraft destroyers. It has a top speed of 70 km per hour and can engage an aircraft from a distance of 4 km. INS Chappell is a significant part of India's naval history, and the decision to revive the warship has been welcomed by many. The refurbishment will help preserve the ship's legacy and attract tourists to Karwar.—*Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Man arrested for stealing 38 phones worth ₹8 lakh

BENGALURU, FEB 27

A man was arrested on Monday for stealing 38 phones worth 8 lakhs. He was arrested following a complaint of mobile theft in Ramamurthy Nagar police station. According to City Police Commissioner B Dayananda, the accused had a specific modus operandi. He allegedly targeted women who were boarding buses at the Tin Factory stop. While pretending to board the bus, he would steal their phones. The accused would then remove the SIM cards from the stolen phones and insert them into other phones. He would then change the passwords of Google Pay and other applications. Subsequently, he would transfer the money from the victim's account to an acquaintance's account and later take the money from them. The police have stated that the accused would spend the stolen money on gambling. —*Salar News*

15th Bengaluru Film Festival to begin on Thursday

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Bengaluru is preparing to be enthralled by the magic of cinema as the 15th edition of the Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFes) kicks off on Thursday. Scheduled to run until 7 March, the festival promises a cinematic feast with 180 films from over 50 countries. Documentaries, biographical pictures, and homages to legendary filmmakers will be screened at the festivals. With screenings taking place at PVR Orion in Rajajinagar, Suchitra Academy, and Dr Rajkumar Bhavana, the festival offers convenient access for movie enthusiasts across the City. Film enthusiasts can expect a diverse range of offerings, showcasing contemporary world cinema across various categories. The festival programme highlights include art films, thematic documentaries, biographical pictures, and homages to legendary filmmakers from across the world. This 15th edition of BIFFes holds a special significance as it coincides with the 90th anniversary of Kannada cinema. This also coincides with the 50th anniversary of Karnataka's renaming. To commemorate these milestones, the festival will showcase 30 Kannada films, allowing audiences to celebrate the rich heritage and vibrant landscape of the regional film industry. Film enthusiasts can expect a diverse range of offerings, showcasing contemporary world cinema across various categories. —*Salar News*

Deadline looms: Signage makers see surge in City

Firms must have 60% of name boards in Kannada by today

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

As the deadline for implementing 60 per cent Kannada on name boards of commercial establishments and others gets over by Wednesday, signage makers in the City and traditional painting board makers are experiencing a surge in demand. However, some establishments are apprehensive that pro-Kannada activists may still remove signage boards despite compliance after a viral video on social media showed signage boards of a clothing establishment being removed, despite featuring a Kannada name.

As the clock ticks, private establishments are rushing to signage board makers to ensure compliance with the new rules by the government. "I observe a variety of customers coming in for modifications," a signage board maker in Girinagar, who has been in Bengaluru for over 20 years in the business, told Salar News. He is receiving 10-15 orders per day, but the shortage of skilled workers is making it challenging to keep up with the demand for signage boards.

Kannada should not instil fear in people, but unfortunately, this move seems to have heightened animosity towards Kannadigas. While some genuinely strive to adapt and learn Kannada, others learn the language in fear, he said.

Traditional signage board makers are also pleased with the government's move as it has provided a boost to their business. The art has not died and "many establishments are turning to traditional boards as they are cost-effective", said Mallikarjun, a traditional board maker with over three decades of experience in RT Street of Chickpete.

Members of Kannada organisation went on a rampage across the City vandalised signboards that were in English ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Mallikarjun was surprised at the resurgence of demand for traditional boards (using paint and brush). "I thought this form of board making was dying out with the rise of digital and other signage makers. However, since the imposition of the 60 per cent Kannada requirement on signage boards, I have received around 200-300 orders across Chickpete. Before, I used to receive one order once in two to three months."

The price of making signboards is Rs 600-700 per square metre for digital signboards and Rs 400-500 sq m for traditional ones. Some signage makers have reduced the prices while others are cashing in on the increased demand.

According to the BBMP, 46,600 shops have erected Kannada signboards till 24 February. Earlier, BBMP had issued 50,216 notices to shop owners to those who did not follow the rules.

A few of the hotel establishments in Basavanagudi, Vasanth Nagar and Cunningham Road are yet to change the nameboards. They said though they had placed orders for the new boards, there was a delay in fulfilling the orders due to high demand from across the City.

Speaking to Salar News, Kannada Culture and Backward Class Minister Shivaraj Tangadagi said, "The action will be initiated shortly for establishments who don't change the name boards, and after discussing with the Chief Minister, licences of the violators will be cancelled."

Meanwhile, Vatal Nagaraj, President of Kannada Chalavali Vatal Paksha, said the failure to comply will undoubtedly lead to intensified protests across the State and call for a bandh. —*Salar News*

CHOCK-A-BLOCK

The move comes after a farmer was recently barred from entering Namma Metro train due to his clothes ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Heavy traffic congestion around Palace Grounds

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Bengaluru witnessed heavy traffic congestion around Palace Grounds on Tuesday due to two large-scale events held in Palace Grounds.

The traffic congestion occurred between 8:30am and 12:30pm. This impacted many of the adjoining roads like Ballari Road (Hebbal to Windsor Manor), Tumakuru Road (Yeswanthpur to IISc), CV Raman Road, Jayamahal Road, and Mekhri Circle, creating huge unrest among the commuters. People travelling in and around these areas experienced delays and longer travel times. The Joint Commissioner of police traffic, Bengaluru informed this on X on Wednesday morning. —*Salar News*

CROSS-VOTING DRAMA

BJP, JD(S) hold protests against ST Somashekar

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Janata Dal (S) and BJP workers held a protest against BJP Yeshwanthpur MLA ST Somashekar for cross-voting for Congress candidate against BJP's whip to vote as per the party's directions in Rajya Sabha elections held here on Tuesday.

Former Congressman Somashekar has been disappointed with BJP for some time and has been allegedly inching towards Congress.

BJP members said the party might suspend Somashekar. Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said, "Somashekar has committed a political suicide by cross-voting. He has cheated the party and the citizens who voted for him. The legal cell of BJP has been alerted to take action against him."

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy said the Congress party has fathered the process of cross-voting and conscience voting. The Congress engineered cross-voting by BJP MLAs on Tuesday, he added.

The JD(S) leader attacked former prime minister Indira Gandhi and said she had coined the term "conscience vote" which is nothing but cross-voting as she wanted to influence MLAs. However, Kumaraswamy said: "Unity is our priority not victory. Our BJP-JD(S) has become stronger after the Rajya Sabha polls. We will show our real game in the Lok Sabha polls." —*Salar News*

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy said the Congress party has fathered the process of cross-voting ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

THE WINNERS

Ajay Maken, 60
Designation: **AICC Treasurer**
Votes won: **47**
Home: **New Delhi**
Education: **MA in Public Admin from Himachal Pradesh University**

Assets: Rs 6 Cr

Past designations
Delhi Minister during Sheila Dixit's tenure

Youngest Speaker of Delhi Assembly in 2003-2004

Criminal Cases

Charges related to Punishment for Rioting (not charged)

Unlawful Assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of common object (not charged)

Gangur Cheluvegowda Chandrashekhar, 55
Designation: **Rajya Sabha MP**
Votes won: **46**
Home: **Mirle, Mysuru, Karnataka**
Education: **MA in Public Administration**

Assets: Rs 14 Cr

Past designations
Member of Parliament Rajya Sabha- Karnataka (2018-2024)

Chairman of Karnataka Urban Water Supply Board (2014-2016)

Syed Naseer Hussain, 53
Designation: **Member of Congress Working Committee**
Votes won: **46**
Home: Ballari
Education: **Doctorate In Philosophy (Intentional Studies) From Jawaharlal Nehru University New Delhi In 2003**
Education: **MA in Public Admin**

Assets: Rs 1.87 Cr

Member of Rajya Sabha- Karnataka (2018-2014)

Coordinator of AICC (2022-Till date)

No cases

Narayana K Bhandage,72
Designation: **Rajya Sabha member**
Votes won: **48**
Home: **Bagalkot**
Ex-MLC & Deputy State President of BJP

What is a whip?

Whip makes sure their fellow party members attend the voting and cast their vote according to their party's official decision. If one decides to go against their party and cross vote then the MLA can be expelled from the party.

A candidate needs 45 first preference votes to get elected

WHAT IS A CROSS-VOTE?

- If a MLA of one party casts their votes in favour of Opposition party's candidate then it is considered cross-voting
- However, when two parties have allied, this rule does not apply
- Both parties can vote for alliance candidates
- To ensure that MLAs do not cross-vote, the parties will launch a whip

BMRCL sensitises security personnel

Security personnel will receive training on professional conduct and communication ***PHOTO: X/@DEEPAKN172)***

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has started training and cultivating sensitivity among its security personnel after a security guard was terminated for denying entry to a farmer due to his attire.

Security personnel will receive training on professional conduct and communication which will equip them with the skills to interact respectfully and professionally with all passengers, regardless of their background or appearance, identifying and addressing discriminatory behaviour, and ensuring fair treatment of all passengers regardless of their attire or appearance.

"We recognise that our security personnel play a vital role in ensuring the safety and security of our passengers. It is crucial that they are equipped with the necessary skills and understanding to handle diverse situations and interact with passengers in a professional and respectful manner. The security guards are already provided with routine training every day before their duty begins, and this additional training will prevent any such incidents from happening in the future," a senior official of BMRCL told Salar News.

The BMRCL also plans to establish a dedicated grievance redressal mechanism (helpline) where passengers can report any instances of discriminatory behaviour by security personnel.

The PRO said: "We are deeply sorry for the inconvenience caused and are committed to learning from this experience. We have outlined a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing their staff's understanding of public service and anti-discrimination policies." —*Salar News*

- The BMRCL also plans to establish a dedicated grievance redressal mechanism (helpline) where passengers can report any instances of discriminatory behaviour by security personnel

Jaishankar, Sitharaman may contest LS polls from K'taka

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi informed that there are chances that BJP might field External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman from the constituencies in the State in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

"Jaishankar and Sitharaman may contest from Karnataka. There is still no clarity about the constituency," Joshi told reporters in Karnataka's Hubballi. Jaishankar is a member of Rajya Sabha from Gujarat whereas Nirmala Sitharaman represents Karnataka in the Upper House. Earlier, Karnataka BJP Chief BY Vijayendra affirmed that BJP and JDS will fight the elections unitedly in all 28 Lok Sabha constituencies and we will make complete efforts to win all of them.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar ***PHOTO: ANI***

Meanwhile, BJP held the core group meeting of five states on Saturday at the party headquarters in New Delhi. Given the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in 2024, the core group meeting of five states was called at the BJP headquarters. —*ANI*

RS poll results victory of morality: Surjewala

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Congress General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala on Tuesday called the party's win in Rajya Sabha elections in Karnataka as the victory of principles, ideals, democracy and morality.

Congress in Karnataka won three seats, and BJP one seat in Rajya Sabha elections in Karnataka. Those who made it to Upper House are former union minister Ajay Maken, GC Chandrasekhar and Syed Naseer Hussain (all Congress) and Narayanasa K Bhandage (BJP). "This is the victory of principles, ideals, democracy and morality. This is a rejection of the opportunistic, unholy and undemocratic alliance of BJP and Janata Dal (Secular) which is founded on muscle power of ED, Income Tax and CBI and money power," Surjewala said after the election results were announced.

He took a dig at former chief minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy for fielding the fifth candidate D Kupendra Reddy. He termed this as Congress' third consecutive victory. The first one came in Assembly elections with a decisive mandate of 134 seats in the 224-member assembly. —*PTI*

ANIMAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

Bannerghatta Park greets female giraffe from Mysuru

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Bengaluru Bannerghatta Biological Park (BBBP) on Tuesday welcomed a new member, a one year seven-month-old female giraffe, to its family.

Shivani, a 13.5-foot-tall giraffe, was born to Bharatha and Babli at Mysuru Zoo on 4 July, 2022. She was shifted from Mysuru Zoo through an animal exchange programme, officials said.

This transfer is part of an approved animal exchange programme facilitated by the Central Zoo Authority.

To ensure stress-free and comfortable transportation, Shivani underwent crate training over the past few weeks before being shifted to the biological park.

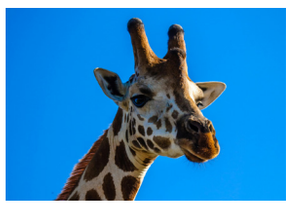


PHOTO: PTI

BBP was housing a lone female Giraffe aged around eight years which was also acquired from Mysore Zoo in April 2018.

As Mysore Zoo is currently housing nine giraffes, they have spared a female with our single female giraffe. Central Zoo Authority, New Delhi, approved the Animal Exchange Program for conservation education. —*PTI*

Mysuru zoo adopts spl steps to protect animals

MYSURU, 27 FEB

With mercury in Mysuru hovering around 33 degree Celsius, authorities of the 133-year-old Mysore Zoo preparing special arrangements to protect the 1,500 species of animals. Authorities are planning to start food enrichment for animals, providing shelter, and introducing activity-based feeding from next week. The staff will focus on keeping the animals cool and hydrated during the sweltering summer months. The animals will be fed more fruits and vegetables especially tender coconuts and watermelons. —*Salar News*

Bandipur National Park to use solar pumps

Chamarajanagara, 27 FEB

Amid scorching summer heat, Bandipur National Park authorities have decided to use solar pump systems for borewells to mitigate water scarcity for the park's wildlife. Ramesh Kumar, Director of Bandipur Tiger Project, said the 10 borewells will be dug up and attached to solar pump sets. —*Salar News*

Kamal Nath shuts down rumours of joining BJP

CHINDWARA, 27 FEB

Former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and veteran Congress leader Kamal Nath has put a full stop to speculation made about him regarding switching sides to BJP. Nath made the remark while addressing the media persons in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district on Tuesday. Congress leader arrived on a five-day visit to the district. He will go to various assemblies in the district and hold meetings with workers and party officials in view of upcoming Lok Sabha elections. When Nath was asked about joining the saffron party, he said, "You (media) are saying this and no one else is saying this. Have you ever heard this from my mouth? Is there any indication? Nothing. You (media) run this news and then ask me about it." *—ANI*

SP leader Shafiqur Rahman Barq dies

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Senior Samajwadi Party leader Shafiqur Rahman Barq, 93, passed away on Tuesday after prolonged illness. The veteran leader served as an MP from Sambhal Lok Sabha constituency. Earlier this month, Samajwadi party Chief Akhilesh Yadav met Barq at Siddha Hospital in Moradabad and inquired about his health. Barq was the oldest member of the current Lok Sabha and had been named by SP as the candidate for Sambhal in 2024 as well. Shafiqur Rahman Barq had been in the headlines for his controversial statements on 'Vande Mataram' and Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan. *—ANI*

Pijush Kanti Biswas returns to Congress fold

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Pijush Kanti Biswas, who had quit TMC and resigned as that party's Tripura unit chief last year, joined Congress on Tuesday. Tripura Congress President Ashish Kumar Saha welcomed Biswas, who joined the party at AICC headquarters in the presence of Congress' Tripura in-charge Girish Chodankar. "It is the happiest day for me. I have come here to join Congress again," Biswas said. "Rahul ji started Nyay Yatra from the northeast. I am from Tripura, a northeast state, which is neglected by our Prime Minister Narendra Modi. All of you know about PM's attitude towards Manipur," he alleged. "Under Rahul Gandhi's leadership, Modi can be defeated and I want to appeal to all to join Gandhi in this fight," Biswas said.*—PTI*

Mamata to build 11L houses if Centre doesn't clear dues

PURULIA, 27 FEB

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said if the Centre does not clear the "dues" of the PM Awas Yojana by 1 April, her government will build 11 lakh houses for the state's poor. Addressing an official programme here, she attacked the BJP-led government at the Centre for holding back funds of central schemes for the state."We will wait till 1 April and if the Centre does not release the funds for the Awas Yojana, then our government will build the 11 lakh houses for the beneficiaries. There is no need to beg the Centre, remember we are not beggars. We are demanding our rights," Banerjee said. She said that her government will be paying around 50 lakh MGNREGA workers whose "dues" were pending with the Centre. Banerjee had earlier announced that 21 lakh workers, who did not get the money from the Centre even after working for the 100-day work scheme during the last three years, would be paid by her government. *—PTI*

BJP wins eight out of ten seats in UP, SP bags two

SP's chief whip Manoj Pandey quit party on Tuesday

LUCKNOW, 27 FEB

Uttar Pradesh BJP leaders and workers celebrate in Lucknow after their big win
PHOTO: X/@AKHILESHYADAV

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday won eight out of 10 Rajya Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. Meanwhile, SP bagged two seats in the state. This came amid big cross-voting upset as seven MLAs of Akhilesh Yadav, one MLA of SBSP and one from Mayawati's BSP voted for BJP. Voting in the elections for the 10 Rajya Sabha seats from Uttar Pradesh began around 9 am on Tuesday. The BJP had fielded eight candidates and the Samajwadi Party (SP) three. Meanwhile, SP's chief whip in state Assembly Manoj Pandey also quit the party on Tuesday. The jolt came a day after he and seven other MLAs skipped a meeting called by Yadav, raising concerns about cross-voting. SP candidate and retired IAS officer Alok Ranjan lost to BJP's Sanjay Seth, an industrialist. The other seven BJP candidates who won are: former Union minister RPN Singh, former MP Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, general secretary of the party's Uttar Pradesh unit Amarpal Maurya, former state minister Sangeeta Balwant (Bind), party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, former MLA Sadhna Singh, and former Agra mayor Naveen Jain. SP's actor-MP Jaya Bachchan won another term while Dalit leader Ramji Lal Suman bagged the second seat for the party. Samajwadi Party President Akhilesh Yadav Tuesday warned action will be taken against such MLAs."Those who wanted to profit from the situation will go. Those who were given assurances will go," Yadav told reporters at the assembly before casting his vote. "BJP can adopt all tricks to win elections. It must have given assurance (to some MLAs) of some profit... BJP will do anything to win," he added. "Those who don't have the courage to fight will go. Some might have been afraid for their security, some might have been threatened or promised something," the SP president said. *—PTI*

IN SANDESHKHALI

ISF MLA held, Cong delegation stopped

KOLKATA, 27 FEB

Police on Tuesday arrested ISF MLA Nausad Siddique near the Science City area here and prevented senior state Congress leaders from heading towards the trouble-torn Sandeshkhal in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, an officer said. Siddique was arrested under preventive laws, the officer said.

The district administration has imposed prohibitory orders in sensitive areas of Sandeshkhali primarily to avert any untoward incident there.

"I do not know why they have arrested me. This is several kilometres away from Sandeshkhali. I was going to Sandeshkhali to meet the villagers there. I did not break any rule or anything", Siddique told reporters.

Siddique said he was scheduled to hold two programmes in Sandeshkhali. ISF MLA was taken to the Kolkata Police headquarters in Lalbazar.

EX-CPI(M) MLA NirapadaSardar gets bail

The Calcutta High Court on Tuesday granted bail to Sandeshkhali's former CPI(M) MLA NirapadaSardar, who was arrested by the police for his alleged involvement in violent protests in the restive area in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district. *—PTI*

Kejri gets 8th summon from ED in excise case

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for the eighth time for questioning in the excise policy-linked money laundering case, on Tuesday.

Kejriwal, national convenor of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), has now been asked to depose at the agency's headquarters on 4 March, they said.

Kejriwal on Monday skipped the seventh summons issued to him in the case, saying he would appear before the agency if a court ordered him to do so.

A city court, approached by ED over Kejriwal skipping its summonses, has listed this matter for further hearing on 16 March.

ED, while issuing the eighth summons, rejected the contention that a fresh notice for Kejriwal's attendance was wrong as the matter was sub-judice.

The agency believes that the local court has prima facie held Kejriwal guilty of "disobeying" the earlier notices issued to him in this case, warranting the eighth summons.

Kejriwal's name has been mentioned multiple times in the charge sheets filed by ED in the case.

The agency has said that the accused were in touch with him regarding the preparation of the now-scrapped Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22. *—PTI*

Jolt to Cong as its MP Naran Rathwa joins BJP

GANDHINAGAR, 27 FEB

In a major blow to Opposition Congress in Gujarat, its Rajya Sabha member and former Union minister NaranRathwa on Tuesday joined the ruling BJP along with his son and a large number of supporters here ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Rathwa is a tribal leader from ChhotaUdepur in Gujarat. His tenure as the Rajya Sabha member is coming to end in April this year. He was elected to the Lok Sabha five times in the past - first in 1989, then in 1991, 1996, 1998 and 2004.

Rathwa's son Sangramsinh had unsuccessfully contested the 2022 assembly election as a Congress candidate. *—PTI*

Cong & Communists foes in Kerala, BFFs elsewhere: Modi

T'PURAM, 27 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday took a swipe at Congress and Communist parties, which are making efforts to form a strong alternative against BJP at the Centre, pointing out that they are each other's enemies in Kerala, but in other states they are BFFs—Best Friends Forever.

Speaking at the conclusion ceremony of BJP state unit's Padayatra at Central Stadium, Modi pilloried the Opposition claiming it lacks a roadmap for the nation's progress and is therefore convinced it won't win the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, due to which its leaders resort to abusing him.

Narendra Modi ***PHOTO: PTI***

Attacking Congress, Modi, in an apparent reference to the Gandhi family, said the track record of the grand old party shows how it managed to keep the country under the control of one family for decades.

"For them (Congress) the interests of that family are above that of all the other families in the country," he alleged, adding that the Communists were now showing the same colours.

In a veiled reference to Rahul Gandhi, who represents Wayanad seat in Lok Sabha, Modi also said that Communists were advising Congress to keep its 'Yuvraj' (prince) out of Kerala.Alleging that LDF and UDF rule did not do anything for the education system in Kerala, Modi said everyone knows about the struggle faced by the students of the poor and the middle class of the state while pursuing higher education."We live by one mantra—'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas'. For us, every community, caste, and region is important. We have worked for the progress of every citizen. In our third term too, we will work with the same intentions," he added. *—PTI*

CPI(M)'s Brinda challenges RaGa's claim on Wayanad

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

After Communist Party of India (CPI) announced senior party leader Annie Raja as a candidate for Wayanad, CPI (M) leader Brinda Karat said that the incumbent MP from Waynad Rahul Gandhi, and the Congress should think about the Waynad seat.

Earlier, Annie Raja said that in Kerala, the fight is between Left Democratic Front (LDF) and United Democratic Front (UDF), adding that the situation is the same and nothing has changed.Rajya Sabha MP and CPI (M) Secretary Binoy Viswam questioned the political logic of Gandhi contesting from Kerala. *—ANI*

3 more booked in Haryana INLD Chief's murder

CHANDIGARH, 27 FEB

Three more people have been booked in connection with the murder of the Indian National Lok Dal's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker in Bahadurgarh near Delhi, police said on Tuesday.

With this, the total number of people booked in the murder case rises to 15. A police official said that based on a statement by Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) leader's son JitendraRathee, VijendraRathee, SandeepRathee and Pale Ram have been named in the FIR. Rathee and INLDworker Jai

Cong in T'gana launches two poll 'guarantees'

HYDERABAD, 27 FEB

The Telangana government on Tuesday launched two poll 'guarantees' of ruling Congress - supply of LPG cylinders for Rs 500 and free power supply up to 200 units to the poor.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy and his cabinet colleagues launched the scheme at the state secretariat here.

The state government had earlier initiated two other schemes free travel for women in state-run RTC buses and a health scheme of Rs 10,00,000 to the poor which are part of the six 'guarantees' announced by Congress ahead of the recent Legislative Assembly elections. *—PTI*

Jharkhand govt tables ₹1.28 lakh cr Budget for FY'25 in assembly

RANCHI, 27 FEB

The Jharkhand government on Tuesday tabled Rs 1.28 lakh crore budget for the 2024-25 fiscal in the assembly, announcing an increase in the limit under the farm loan waiver scheme to Rs 2 lakh and a coverage of 5 lakh additional beneficiaries under the state food security programme.

The budgetary estimates for FY'25 were up by over 10 per cent from the previous annual financial statement. The JMM-led coalition government had presented a budget of Rs 1.16 lakh crore for the current financial year 2023-24."I lay on the table of the House a budget of Rs 1,28,900 crore for the financial year 2024-25," Finance Minister Rameshwar Oraon said in the assembly.

This was the first budget of the newly formed ChampaiSoren government.The budget will meet the aspirations of every section of the society, including poor people, farmers, tribals and women, and will bolster the overall development of the state, Oraon said.The government introduced a separate 'Bal' budget for inclusive development of students with an allocation of Rs 8,866 crore, which is part of the total estimates. Oraon also announced an increase in the limit under the Farm Loan Waiver scheme from existing Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh.Under the 'AbuaAwas (Housing) Yojana', the government planned to build 3.50 lakh houses in 2024-25. *—PTI*

U'khand gets ₹89K cr Budget

DEHRADUN, 27 FEB

The Uttarakhand government on Tuesday presented the budget for financial year 2024-25 ***PHOTO: X***

The Uttarakhand government on Tuesday presented the budget for financial year 2024-25 in the state assembly with an allocation of over Rs 89,000 crore, focusing on welfare of the poor, disaster mitigation, infrastructure development and improving air connectivity in all districts.

Presenting the budget of Rs 89,230.07 crore in the House, state finance minister PremchandAgarwal said it was an inclusive budget aimed at building a developed, well-governed and capable Uttarakhand. "The spirit of the budget is inclusive and it touches all sections," he said.

Providing necessary furniture to all government schools, solar energy saturation system in all government buildings in a phased manner, and e-office implementation in all government offices are also among the other priorities, he said.

Besides, the budget will also give priority to total digitisation of land and other government records, bio-fencing saturation of agriculture, horticulture and forest departments, construction of Panchayat buildings, theme parks, parking lots and theme-based science and innovation centres, Agarwal said. The budget is slated to be passed by the state assembly on 1 March after a debate over the next few days.

Out of the total outlay of Rs 89,230.07 crore, the government has budgeted Rs 55,815.77 crore for revenue expenditure and Rs 33,414.30 crore for capital expenditure. It has allocated Rs 1,404.30 crore for PWD and put Rs 917.47 crore under maintenance head. *—PTI*

M'rashtra: Ajit Pawar presents revenue-deficit interim budget

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Maharashtra Finance Minister AjitPawar on Tuesday presented a Rs 6,00,522crore interim budget for 2024-25 with a revenue deficit of Rs 9,734 crore in the state legislative assembly.

The budget proposed no new taxes. A supplementary budget (full budget) will be presented after LokSabha elections.

With projected revenue receipts of Rs 4,98,758 crore and revenue expenditure of Rs 5,08,492 crore, there will be a revenue deficit of Rs 9,734 crore, said Pawar, who joined Shiv Sena-BJP government as Deputy Chief Minister in July 2023. He was finance minister in the previous Maha Vikas Aghadi government too.

School Education Minister Deepak Kesarkar read out the budget in the Legislative Council.

"The budget focuses on the implementation of welfare schemes for the youth, women, the poor, and farmers," Pawar said in the assembly.

The government aims to expand the state's economy to USD 1 trillion through sustainable, environment-friendly, and inclusive development, he said.

In the Annual Plan 2024-25, an outlay of Rs 1.92 lakh crore has been proposed which includes Rs 15, 893 crores for the Scheduled Castes Sub Plan and Rs 15,360 crore for Tribal Development Sub Plan, he said.

The government has succeeded in keeping fiscal deficit and revenue deficit within the limits set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Financial Management Act, Pawar said.

An outlay of Rs 18,165 crore has been proposed for District Annual Plan, a 20 percent increase over the previous year. *—PTI*

Lok Sabha polls: AAP fields four from Delhi

HYDERABAD, 27 FEB

Aam Aadmi Party on Tuesday announced four candidates from Delhi and one from Haryana for Lok Sabha polls, fielding three-time MLA Somnath Bharti from New Delhi seat and former Rajya Sabha MP Sushil Gupta from Kurukshetra.

AAP declared the candidates two days after it finalised the seat-sharing deal with INDIA bloc ally Congress. AAP is the first major party to name candidates for Lok Sabha polls in Delhi where all seven seats have been held by BJP since 2014.

While Malviya Nagar MLA and Delhi Jal Board vice-chairman Somnath Bharti has been fielded from New Delhi constituency.. *—PTI*

AFTER JARANGE'S REMARKS

Speaker directs SIT probe into conspiracy of unrest in M'rashtra

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Maharashtra Assembly speaker Rahul Narwekar on Tuesday directed the government to set up an Special Investigation Team (SIT) and conduct a comprehensive inquiry into the controversial remarks of Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange against Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis.

The assembly also witnessed a brief adjournment after the ruling alliance members pointed to remarks of Jarange and alleged there was a conspiracy to create unrest in the state. The ruling side members stood up, demanding action against those inciting violence.

Speaking in AntarwaliSarati village in Jalna district on Sunday, Jarange alleged Fadnavis was trying to kill him. The activist also said he would march to Mumbai and protest outside the residence of the deputy Chief Minister.

Ashish Shelar(BJP) demanded to know who was behind Jarange's actions, aimed at creating "unrest" in the state by saying Maharashtra will be "burnt down."

He alleged there was a conspiracy to unsettle Maharashtra and malign the Maratha community, known to be brave and disciplined. "We have been supporting Jarange's demands but are critical of his threatening remarks against Fadnavis," he said.

Fadnavis said in the House that he has no complaints against Jarange. The SIT will investigate whose "script" he is speaking, the deputy Chief Minister said.

"Jarange may have made wild allegations against me, but the entire Maratha community supports me," he said.Leader of Opposition Vijay Wadettiwar said they do not support Jarange's comments but there is a need to go to the root cause of the issue. The use of police force was not required (during Jarange's agitation over quota issue last year), he said, adding the government must act against those who make provocative comments.

Congress Legislature Party leader BalasahebThorat said the opposition side was nowhere in the picture during discussions between the government and Jarange. The government was communicating with Jarange and the 'gulal' of victory was sprinkled in Navi Mumbai, he said. *—PTI*

Rahul Narwekar ***PHOTO: PTI***

PHOTO: PIXABAY

5 killed, 2 injured as SUV rams into dumper in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 27 FEB

Five people were killed and two others injured after a speeding sports utility vehicle (SUV) rammed into a stationary dumper in Dholka town of Gujarat's Ahmedabad district on Tuesday morning, police said. The accident occurred at around 5am when the SUV hit the dumper at the road side on a highway near the town, an official from Dholka police station said. The SUV was on way to Dahod from Botad district in Gujarat, the official said. Five men were killed in the incident. A woman was among the two persons who received injuries and they were taken to a government hospital in Ahmedabad, he said.—*PTI*

Man shoots wife and brother after suspecting affair

SAHARANPUR, 27 FEB

A man shot at his wife and brother here on Tuesday, suspecting them of being in a relationship. The woman died on the spot, police said. The man first shot his wife on the head and later went and opened fire on his brother, they said. The accused's brother is undergoing treatment at a hospital where his condition was said to be critical, police said. The woman was living with her parents for some time after a dispute with her husband, police said. Additional SP (city) Abhimanyu Manglik said that the accused suspected that his wife and his younger brother were in a relationship. Police is trying to nab the accused who is absconding, he said.—*PTI*

Two arrested for killing couple, burning bodies

GODDA, 27 FEB

Two people have been arrested for allegedly killing a couple and setting their bodies on fire over a land dispute in Jharkhand's Godda district, police said. The incident took place in Kairasol village in Sundar Pahadi police station area. The charred remains of the couple, identified as Anant Madaiya ,52, and his wife Savitri Devi,49, were found in a forest near the village on Monday, Godda Subdivisional Police Officer JPN Chaudhary said. Two people, identified as Virendra Madaiy ,23, and Mithlesh Madaiya,19, were picked up for questioning, and during interrogation, they confessed to killing their neighbours with whom their father Sona Lal had a long-standing land dispute, he said. Police were acting on the basis of information about the couple being missing for over a week. The two accused confessed that they killed the couple with sharp objects on February 18 and took the bodies to a nearby jungle, and set those on fire, Chaudhary said. The charred remains were found at the spot, he said. adding a case registered under Indian Penal Code.

—*PTI*

Man sets in-law's house on fire, kills niece

RAISEN, 27 FEB

A man allegedly set his brother-in-law's house on fire, killing his seven-year-old niece over a family dispute in Madhya Pradesh's Raisen district, police said on Tuesday. The police have arrested the accused, Ramu Adivasi, in connection with the incident that occurred on Sunday night at Jamgarh village. According to the police, there was marital discord between Adivasi and his wife, and she was living separately. The accused suspected his brother-in-law Rajesh of not permitting his wife to return to him. Adivasi allegedly set fire to the hut when the family was inside.—*PTI*

Why is UNSC ineffective in Russia-Ukraine war: India

Ruchira Kamboj says India is concerned over the situation in Ukraine

NEW YORK, 27 FEB

India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Ruchira Kamboj has questioned the United Nations Security Council for not being able to resolve the conflict between Russia and Ukraine that has continued for over two years.

Calling for reforming "outdated and archaic structures," Kamboj in the United Nations General Assembly meeting on the situation in Ukraine said that India is concerned over the situation in Ukraine and reiterated Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement "this is not an era of war."

During his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Summit (SCO) in Samarkand in 2022, Prime Minister Modi had said, "this is not an era of war."

"At the present juncture, as the conflict has continued for two years unabated, we, the Committee of UN Member States, must pause and ask ourselves two pressing questions. One, are we anywhere near a possible acceptable solution? And if not, why is it that the UN system particularly its principal organ, the United Nations Security Council, mandated to primarily maintain international peace and security. Why is it rendered completely ineffective to the resolution of the ongoing conflict?," Kamboj said.

Kamboj said that the member states must remain focussed on shared objectives to achieve development goals. She stressed that member states should aim for more cooperation as they continue to make efforts to achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) back on track.

Kamboj said, "I will reiterate Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion that 'this is not an era of war'. We must remain focused on our shared objectives to achieve our development goals and the partnership and cooperation that we will need for achieving these."

Highlighting India's stance amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, Kamboj said that India has consistently stated that escalation of hostilties and violence is in the interest of no one.

She stated that India has called for making efforts for early cessation of hostilities and returning to path of dialogue and diplomacy.

Ever since the war erupted between Russia and Ukraine, India has called for resolving the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. —*ANI*

India's permanent representative Ruchira Kamboj raises questions at the UNSC session PHOTO: ANI

CONFLICT IN GAZA MATTER OF GREAT CONCERN: EAM

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The conflict in Gaza is of great concern and the humanitarian crises arising out of it require a sustainable solution, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Tuesday.

At the same time, referring to the 7 October terror attack on Israel by Hamas, he asserted that "terrorism and hostage-taking" are unacceptable. The external affairs minister made the remarks in his virtual statement at the 55th session of the UN Human Rights Council held in Geneva. "The humanitarian crises arising from conflicts require a sustainable solution that gives immediate relief to those most affected," he said." At the same time, we must be clear that terrorism and hostage-taking are unacceptable. It also goes without saying that international humanitarian law must always be respected," he said. —*PTI*

FAMILY CLAIMS

'3 killed in fake encounter were not Naxalites'

KANKER, 27 FEB

The families of three men killed in a gunfight with police in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district two days ago have claimed they were not Naxalites and the encounter was fake, a charge denied by the police. Kanker Superintendent of Police Indira Kalyan Elesela said there was no wrongdoing and that locals and family members of the deceased make such claims after every encounter under the pressure of Naxalites.

Police earlier claimed the three "Naxalites" were killed on a forested hill between Bhomra-Hurtarai villages under Koyalibeda police station limits on Sunday morning in an encounter with security personnel during an anti-Naxal operation.

They identified the deceased as Rameshwar Negi, Suresh Teta, natives of Marda village, and Anil Kumar Hidko, from Pairvi village in the area.

Hidko's wife Surja said "We are farmers and only work at our farm and home,"

—*PTI*

4 Naxalites killed in encounter

Raipur, 27 Feb

Four Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Tuesday, a senior police official said. The face-off took place in a forest under Jangla police station area when separate teams of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were out on an anti-Naxal operation, he said.

—*PTI*

Driverless train: Probe finds driver & station master at fault

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

A preliminary probe into the incident of the driverless running of a freight train for about 70km from Kathua (Jammu) to Ucchi Bassi Station (Punjab) in Jammu Tawi-Pathankot section has suggested that both the driver as well as the station master failed to fulfil their responsibilities.

The joint probe report, signed by five senior railway officials, has recorded the statements of various people involved in the incident and described the turn of events which point to dereliction of duties on the part of the driver and the station master of Kathua.

Exclusively accessed by PTI, the report said the loco pilot in his statement submitted that besides stabilising the engine and three wagons of the train by applying hand brakes, he also placed two wooden wedges before the wheels of the loco so that it couldn't move.The report added that, however, when the train was stopped at Ucchi Bassi the concerned station master carried out an inspection which was video recorded and found that the wagons' handbrakes were not in applied position.It further noted that the station master of Kathua, who was on duty, did not stabilise the train properly from 6.05am to 7.10am. —*PTI*

STUDY REVEALS

'Indians suffer high rate of lung damage after Covid'

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Indians suffer high rates of lung function damage after acute Covid with about half reporting shortness of breath, according to a recent study, a worrying finding that experts attribute to various reasons, including co-morbidities and pollution.

The study by the Christian Medical College, Vellore, is the largest from India to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on lung function. It examined 207 individuals, showcasing substantial impairment in lung function, exercise capacity, and quality of life among recovered individuals.

The study revealed a high prevalence of respiratory symptoms among Indians who recovered, even after a mean of over two months following acute illness, with shortness of breath reported in 49.3 per cent and cough in 27.1 per cent of the cohort.

"It is clear from the study that lung function is affected more in the Indian population compared to data from other countries across every category of disease severity," said study lead researcher D J Christopher, professor of pulmonary medicine at CMC Vellore.

"Although it is impossible to know the exact cause of worse impairment among Indians, co-morbidities may be a factor contributing to lung damage, as our population had much higher co-morbidities than the others " Christopher told PTI.

The study, published recently in the journal PLOS Global Public Health, compared data from Europe and China.

An Italy-based study, for instance, found dyspnoea or shortness of breath present in 43 per cent and cough in less than 20 per cent of the subjects.

The corresponding figures from a Chinese study were also lower than those seen in the Indian study. In terms of co-morbidities, CMS Vellore researchers found 72.5 per cent of individuals reporting underlying health conditions. —*PTI*

Student dies by suicide, family blames loan app

HYDERABAD, 27 FEB

A 20-year-old engineering student allegedly died by suicide at his house here, even as family members on Tuesday alleged that he took the extreme step due to harassment from executives of an online loan app over repayment.

The deceased, who was a BTech third year student, hanged himself from the ceiling fan on Monday when nobody else was in the house, police said, adding that they are also investigating the allegations of harassment by the loan app executives.

Based on preliminary investigation, police said the student had borrowed from his friends and other students in the college apart from the online loan app. He had also lost money playing online games and was reportedly upset about the financial debts, they said.

According to his father he had repaid Rs 3 lakh of the loan amount.The family members said that despite clearing the loans, agents from the app were harassing by calling other family members and relatives for repayment. Following this, the boy died by suicide. —*PTI*

Odisha's tiger population surges, now pegged at 30, says report

BHUBANESWAR, 27 FEB

The first All Odisha Tiger Estimation (AOTE) report 2023-24 conducted by the Odisha Forest Department has reported an increase in the number of tigers in Odisha.

As per the report, of the 30 tigers, a total of 27 unique adult tigers were camera-trapped in Odisha during the AOTE exercise, and evidence of another three adult tigers were also found in the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR), which have not been camera-trapped.

The 27 tigers include 14 males and 13 females. The STR has the highest number of 24 big cats. It has 11 usual colour morph tigers (seven females and four males), 13 pseudo melanistic tigers (seven females and six males), and eight tiger cubs.

According to an official release from the Forest Department Odisha, "All Odisha Tiger Estimation (AOTE), 2023-2024 was conducted, which spanned across 47 forest divisions, aimed at much more intensive state-level tiger monitoring. A state-level field survey was conducted to look for tiger signs such as pugmarks, scrapes, scats, rakes, urine spray, vocalization and livestock depredation."

Sites where the direct and indirect signs of tigers were found with certainty were intensively camera trapped to arrive at the minimum number of unique adult tigers based on their distinctive stripe pattern.

—*ANI*

PHOTO: X

MAN DONATES ₹2.25 CR TO FREE UAE PRISONERS

DUBAI, 26 FEB

In a pre-Ramzan gesture, a UAE-based Indian businessman and philanthropist has donated 1 million dirhams (approximately INR 2.5 crore) to ensure the release of 900 prisoners from jails across the Gulf nation.Firoz Merchant,66, who is the owner of Pure Gold Jewellers, donated the money to the UAE authorities, a testament to the holy month's message of humility, humanity, forgiveness, and kindness."Indian businessman and philanthropist Firoz Merchant of Pure Gold has donated Rs 2.25 Crores ,"his office said. —*BBC*

Jobless youths increased 7 folds in a year in Assam, finds survey

GUWAHATI, 27 FEB

The latest Economic Survey Assam has stated that nearly 10 lakh fresh educated youths have registered in employment exchanges in the state in 2022 compared to just 1.4 lakh in the previous year.

Terming it a huge challenge before the state, the Economic Survey, Assam for 2023-24 stated that the size of the educated job seekers is considerably high with new registration jumping by a whopping over seven times in just a single year.

"From the records of the live register of Employment Exchanges, the registered educated job seekers stood at 9,83,093 in 2022 as against 1,37,865 during 2021," it added. The report, which was tabled in the Assam Assembly during the Budget Session this month, stressed that the number of educated job seekers has increased at all levels of education in 2022 over 2021.

It said that the overall number of educated job seekers stood at 18,05,441 as per registrations at Employment Exchanges in 2021. —*PTI*

Overall number of educated job seekers stood at 18,05,441 as per registrations at Employment Exchanges in 2021 PHOTO: AP

GOVT GIVES RS 10 LAKH

Another Kerala man dies in tusker attack

IDUKKI , 27 FEB

The Kerala government on Tuesday handed over an immediate financial assistance of Rs 10 lakh to the family of an autorickshaw driver who was killed in an attack by a stray wild elephant near the tourist town of Munnar in this hilly district. Suresh Kumar,44, hailing from Kannimala Top Division here, was attacked and killed by a rogue elephant in Kannimala estate while he was on his way to drop some passengers on Monday night.

Authorities held an emergency meeting at a high-range hospital here in the morning and handed over the financial aid to Kumar's family comprising his wife and two children.

A senior leader of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) here said a dawn-to-dusk hartal announced by the ruling front in KDH Village, comprising Munnar Town, was withdrawn in the wake of the financial assistance being handed over to Kumar's family and other significant decisions taken during the meeting.

"Based on a decision taken during the meeting, a cheque of Rs 10 lakh was handed over to Kumar's wife Indira," CPI Idukki district assistant secretary P Palanivel told PTI.

"A decision was also taken that the educational expenses of his children would be taken over by the government. It was also decided to recommend to the government to provide a job to one of the family members in the Forest department," he said.

In the wake of wild elephants frequent venturing into the region, a decision was taken to deploy a Rapid Response Team (RRT), he said.

Forest authorities would also provide announcements in the morning every day about the movement of stray elephants if any in the area, he added. —*PTI*

A man was attacked and killed by a rogue elephant in Kannimala estate near Munnar on Monday PHOTO: PIXABAY

6 TN FISHERMEN WHO WERE HELD IN LANKA RETURN

BHUBANESWAR, 27 FEB

Six fishermen from Tamil Nadu apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy on January 23, were released this morning and reached Chennai airport. In an official post on X, the Indian embassy in Sri Lanka confirmed the return of six fishermen," Returning home! Six Indian fishermen were repatriated from Sri Lanka to Chennai early this morning"

Upon arrival, the fishermen expressed gratitude for their safe return and thanked both the Indian and Sri Lankan governments for facilitating their release. The incident underscores the challenges faced by fishermen operating in the waters between India and Sri Lanka. —*ANI*

Hoax bomb threat delays flight, woman detained

NEW DELHI , 27 FEB

A Kolkata-bound Spicejet flight was delayed for more than five hours on Tuesday after the Delhi airport received a threat message about explosives being hidden in the passengers' luggage, official sources said.

A woman carrying an infant has been detained by security agencies for questioning in the case, the sources said.

The flight, SG-8263, was scheduled to depart around 5.40am but it was allowed to leave only after 11:30 am after the security agencies completed an anti-sabotage check and repeat frisking of check-in and cabin baggage of the travellers and crew, they said.

The airport duty manager at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport received an email around 5.20am that "there is a safety issue" on the said flight and that "somebody was taking explosion goods in bags and luggage" onboard, a senior official said.The message was immediately flashed across and a bomb threat assessment committee comprising various security agencies and airport officials was convened. The aircraft was sent to be parked at an isolation bay at the airport, the official said and added that the message was declared a hoax and the flight was allowed to depart. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

A SHOW OF UNITY

Latvia's Prime Minister Evika Silina is welcomed by French President, Emmanuel Macron, at the Elysee Palace in Paris. More than 20 European heads of state and government and other Western officials are gathering in a show of unity for Ukraine
PHOTO PTI

Wayanad out on streets after elephant attacks

On 10 February, Joseph was returning from morning prayers at her village church in Mananthavady town in the hilly Wayanad district of the southern Indian state of Kerala when she saw a vehicle carrying a bleeding man.

When she reached home, she found out that it was the body of her father Ajeesh Joseph, a 42-year-old farmer, who had been trampled to death by a radio-collared wild elephant - the second such death in the district in three weeks.

As soon as the local hospital confirmed his death, protests erupted in the town. They were withdrawn only after the authorities announced a 1m-rupee ($12,067, £9,525) compensation for Joseph's family and a job for his widow.

Neighbouring Karnataka state, to which the elephant belonged, also announced a compensation of 1.5m rupees.

Six days later, another wild elephant killed Pakkam Vellachalil Paul, a 50-year-old employee of a state-owned eco-tourism project, while he was on duty in Pulpally town, about 24km (15 miles) away.

Since then, Wayanad district - known for its dense forests - has witnessed massive protests as angry residents blame authorities for failing to protect them from wild animal attacks.

Opposition Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi, who represents the Wayanad constituency in parliament, rushed to the state on Sunday to meet the families of the animal attack victims.

The state government held an all-party meeting and promised to cover medical expenses of those affected by such attacks, while the forest department said it had issued orders to tranquillise the elephant that attacked Joseph.

Known for its lush green landscape, the state covers only 1.2% of India's land area, but accounts for 2.3% of its forest cover.

Wayanad has 11,531sq km (1.1m hectares) under forest cover, which is 29.6% of the state's geographical area.

Wayanad district known for its dense forest witnessed massive protest
PHOTO: BBC

Residents of the district say most of the electric fencing and trenches dug to protect them from animal intrusions are in ruins.

But residents don't entirely agree and blame government policies for shrinking natural habitats that are forcing animals into residential areas.

N Badusha, a 71-year-old farmer and environmental activist who lives near the district's Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary, says the area lies at the junction of wildlife reserves of three states.

"Traditional farmers like me and the tribespeople lived here harmoniously for years," he says.

But decades of bamboo extraction from areas that the elephants relied on for sustenance have destroyed their food source, he says, adding that the government's push for monoculture plantations such as teak, sandalwood, mahogany, acacia and eucalyptus has also affected the movement of wild animals.

"The pristine and precious green spaces, vast swamps and wetlands are depleting," he explains, pushing wild animals, such as elephants onto farmlands and residential areas.

They blame the authorities for failing to find a solution to the resultant animal attacks.

In some of the recent cases, residents have also questioned the shoddy response by the authorities.

They say that the elephant that attacked Joseph had a radio-collar. So, how come the authorities failed to track the animal and drive it back to the forest?

Saseendran told there had been a delay in tracking the elephant due to signal disruption from the radio-collar.

In the case of Paul's death, his family also alleges that he failed to get medical treatment at the right time.

"He was shivering in fear and pain," his 16-year-old daughter Sona says. "Had he got timely medical assistance, he would have survived."

"It's not just wild elephants they are worried about but animals like wild boars, tigers, bison and monkeys that make off with their cattle and eat their crops.

"Two months ago, a tiger killed a man and his half-eaten body was recovered later," Ali says. "People wanted to shoot the animal but were stopped by the authorities."

Forest officials have also not been able to locate the tiger that killed the cattle in Pulpally as its pugmarks were untraceable.

"My only prayer is that no child is orphaned because of irresponsible authorities again," Sona says. "No other little one should ever have to cry like I did. We should be able to leave our homes without fear of an attack." *—BBC News*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

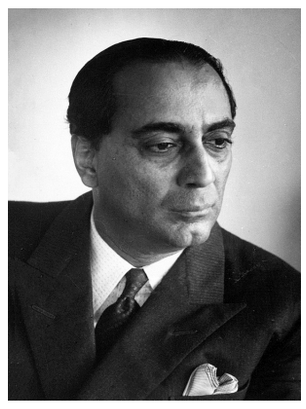
SALAR ساڈھ بنگلور

Science Day: Remembering Raman, Kalam and others

National Science Day is celebrated every year in India on 28 February to honour the discovery of a phenomenon of the scattering of photons by Indian scientist Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman in 1928.

The National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), in 1986, asked the Government of India to announce 28 February as National Science Day. The government accepted and the first National Science Day was celebrated on 28 February, 1987.

As the country celebrates National Science Day today, here's remembering some of India's national heroes who took us a step ahead in the division.



CV Raman and Homi J Bhabha
PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

CV Raman

National Science Day is observed throughout the country on 28 February in honour of physicist CV Raman's discovery of the Raman Effect for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in the year 1930.

Effect that brought India its first Nobel Prize in Physics and second Nobel Prize as a whole was based on the phenomenon of the scattering of light.

The Raman Effect is the change in the wavelength of light as it gets deflected by a molecule while passing through a chemical compound. It is the Raman Effect of light that causes the sky's appearance to be blue.

Homi J Bhabha

Another scientist who brought India accolades is the Padma Bhushan awardee Homi J Bhabha. For his numerous discoveries in the sphere of Nuclear energy, Bhabha has received the title of 'father of Indian nuclear programme'.

Bhabha has supervised the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) and Atomic Energy Establishment, Trombay (AEET), both of which have been the cornerstones for the development of Indian nuclear weapons.

In his honour, AEET was later renamed as the famous Bhabha Atomic Research Centre.

APJ Abdul Kalam

Known as the Missile Man of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam contributed little more than scientific discoveries to the nation as he also served as the 11th President of India and was widely regarded as the 'People's President'.

Kalam worked with India's two major space research organisations Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

His most significant works include the development of the ballistic missile and the launch vehicle technology. He played a central role in one of India's most important nuclear tests - Pokhran-II.

For his work in the stream of science and politics, People's President was awarded India's highest civilian honour or Bharat Ratna.

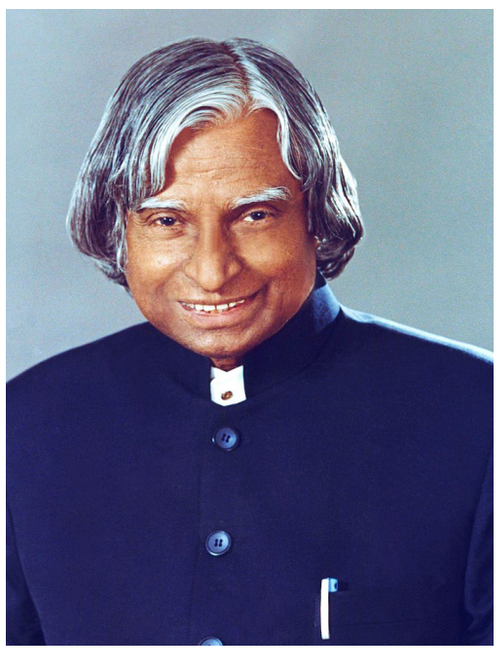
- The National Council for Science and Technology Communication (NCSTC), in 1986, asked the Government of India to announce 28 February as National Science Day. The government accepted and the first National Science Day was celebrated on 28 February, 1987

Rakesh Shvarma

Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma is the first and the only Indian who has travelled in the space till date. Before turning into a cosmonaut, Sharma worked as an air force pilot in the Indian Armed Forces.

Sharma - a recipient of the Ashok Chakra - when asked about how India looked from the outer space by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi he replied, "Sare Jahan se Accha" or the best in the world.

There are many other science stars who have been shining bright in the field and have brought India accolades in the field of sciences.
—ANI



APJ Abdul Kalam (MIssile man of India) and Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma (only Indian travelled to space). Their contribution brought India accolades
PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

AI could make the four-day workweek inevitable

Working four days while getting paid for five is a dream for many employees. Yet the dramatic shifts in the pandemic-era workplace have turned this once unfathomable idea into a reality for some workers. And as more global data emerges, an increasing number of companies are courting the approach after positive trial-run results across countries including the UK, Iceland, Portugal and more.

Now, as pilots continue – in Germany, a trial of 45 companies has just begun, for instance – another factor has entered the mix.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is gathering pace in the workplace, and some experts believe it could accelerate the adoption of the four-day workweek.

Data from London-based news-and-events resource Tech.co collected in late 2023 lends credence to this idea. For their 2024 Impact of Technology on the Workplace, the company surveyed more than 1,000 US business leaders. The researchers found 29% of organisations with four-day workweeks use AI extensively in their firms' operations, implementing generative AI tools such as ChatGPT as well as other programmes to streamline operations. In comparison, only 8% of five-day working week organisations use AI to this extent. And 93% of businesses using AI are open to a four-day work week, whereas for those who don't, fewer than half are open to working shorter weeks.

At London-based digital design agency Driftime, adopting AI technology has been crucial to enable the business to operate a flexible four-day work week. "By handing over simple tasks to AI tools, we gain invaluable time previously lost to slow aspects of the process," says co-founder Abb-d Taiyo. "With tools like Modyfi, the graphics are all live and modifiable, making it so much easier and quicker for our designers to create concepts and ideas."

Taiyo believes it makes sense for both his employees and his bottom line to work the condensed week. "Instead of a dip in the quantity of work created over just four days, we've seen a remarkably high quality of work matched by a high staff satisfaction return. The health and happiness of our team is in direct correlation to the high standard of work produced," he says.

AI has been crucial to enable the business to operate flexible four-day work week
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Shayne Simpson, group managing director of UK-based TechNET IT Recruitment, also believes AI has been fundamental to the success of the company's four-day work week policy. The firm has found AI tools save each of their recruitment consultants 21 hours per week, primarily by automating previously manual tasks like data input, confirmation emails, resume screening and candidate outreach. This has reduced the time to fill permanent roles at the company by an average of 10 days. "This timesaving allows our team to achieve their weekly goals earlier in the week and the flexibility liberates our consultants from being tethered to their desks, enabling them to enjoy a well-deserved Friday off," says Simpson.

Not only has the company's abridged workweek boosted productivity and morale, Simpson says it's also been key to attracting talent to work within the company itself. "Seasoned recruitment professionals are enticed by our streamlined processes while entry-level talent is eager to embrace new tools." It's lifted the entire business, he adds.

> **By handing over simple tasks to AI tools, we gain invaluable time previously lost to slow aspects of the process"**
>
> -Abb-d Taiyo, Drifttime Co- founder

While AI tools are certainly paving the way for a four-day work week within some industries, the technology can't usher in the change alone. Organisational culture within a business is also fundamental, says Na Fu, a professor in human resource management at Trinity Business School, Ireland. "An openness to innovative work structures, an experimental mindset and, importantly, a culture grounded in high levels of trust are all important for the four-day work week to be successfully adopted," she says.

Rather than becoming mere caretakers or servants of machines, human workers need to develop new skills that can leverage, complement and lead AI, achieving the enhanced outcomes.

Some industries will benefit from AI more than others, however – notably those who are able to use generative AI tools for such tasks including software development, content creation, marketing and legal services, says Fu. Plus, artificial intelligence development still has a way to go if it is to substantially reduce human working hours across the board.

What may drive the shift to a four-day workweek in an AI-powered business landscape may not ultimately be up to the robots, however. Executive buy-in is required, and whether leaders will embrace the unconventional concept will vary depending on a firm's overarching purpose and values, says Fu. Instead of letting AI supplement the work of humans, for instance, some businesses could use it to automate certain tasks while piling other work on employees to fill newly open hours.

Still, despite some reservation, an increasing number of business leaders – including those from some of the world's highest-earning companies – see a technology-driven shortened workweek as an inevitable future. In October 2023, JPMorgan Chase & Co CEO Jamie Dimon told:"Your children are going to live to 100, and they'll probably be working three-and-a-half days a week." Employees will have to wait and see.
—BBC News

Israel would halt war during Ramadan: Biden

Joe Biden said a deal has to be reached where Hamas would release some of the hostages

JERUSALEM, 27 FEB

Israel would be willing to pause its war on Hamas in Gaza during the upcoming Muslim fasting month of Ramadan if a deal is reached to release some of the hostages held by the militants, President Joe Biden said in comments released on Tuesday.

There was no immediate Israeli reaction to Biden's comments on an emerging framework deal, brokered by the United States, Egypt and Qatar, under which Hamas would free some of the dozens of hostages it holds in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners and a six-week halt in fighting.

During the temporary pause, negotiations would continue over the release of the remaining hostages and additional Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. A Hamas official played down any sense of progress, saying the group wouldn't soften its demands.

The start of Ramadan, which falls around 10 March, is seen as an unofficial deadline for a ceasefire deal. The month is a time of heightened religious observance and dawn-to-dusk fasting for hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world.

US President Joe Biden said on Monday that he hopes a cease-fire deal could take effect by next week **PHOTO: PTI**

Biden said Monday that he hopes a cease-fire deal could take effect by next week. "Ramadan's coming up and there has been an agreement by the Israelis that they would not engage in activities during Ramadan as well, in order to give us time to get all the hostages out," Biden said in an appearance on NBC's "Late Night With Seth Meyers".

At the same time, Biden did not call for an end to the war, which was triggered by the deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel on 7 October, when militants killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted roughly 250 people, according to Israeli authorities.

Biden, who has shown staunch support for Israel throughout the war, left open the door to an eventual Israeli ground offensive in the city of Rafah in southern Gaza, on the border with Egypt, where more than half of the enclave's 2.3 million people have fled under Israeli evacuation orders.

The prospect of an invasion of Rafah has prompted global alarm over the fate of Gaza civilians trapped there. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said a ground operation in Rafah is an inevitable component of Israel's strategy for crushing Hamas.

- The prospect of an invasion of Rafah has prompted global alarm over the fate of Gaza civilians trapped there. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said a ground operation in Rafah is an inevitable component of Israel's strategy for crushing Hamas.

This week, the military submitted for Cabinet approval operational plans for the offensive, as well as evacuation plans for civilians there. Biden said he believes Israel has slowed its bombardment of Rafah.

"The resistance is not interested in giving up any of its demands, and what is proposed does not meet what it had requested," he told the Pan-Arab TV channel Al Mayadeen. Hamas has previously demanded that Israel end the war as part of any deal, which Netanyahu called "delusional". *—PTI*

Sri Lanka sets up fund to help Gaza children

COLOMBO, 27 FEB

The Sri Lankan government will contribute USD 1 million to a fund set up by it to help children in war-torn Gaza who are affected by the Israel-Hamas conflict, it was announced on Tuesday.

All ministries and government institutions have been directed to forego Ifthar celebrations during the upcoming Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and to contribute to the Children of Gaza Fund, a press release issued by President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office said. The Sri Lankan Cabinet has approved the proposal by President Wickremesinghe to create the fund to help children caught in the war in Gaza, it said.

Contributions by citizens are also encouraged for this purpose, it said. The government will also donate USD 1 million in aid for the affected children. The aid will be distributed through official UN agencies. Sri Lanka has called for a ceasefire in war-torn Gaza while advocating for a Palestine state. President Wickremesinghe has also highlighted the need to ensure the security of Israel. *—PTI*

The Sri Lankan government will contribute $1 million **PHOTO: PTI**

Israel destroys weapons factory in Gaza

TEL AVIV, 27 FEB

Israeli soldiers continued to conduct targeted raids in the Gaza City district of Zeitoun, the Israel Defence Forces said on Tuesday. In joint operations with the Israeli Air Force, ground forces located a Hamas weapons manufacturing facility, rocket launchers, and other military systems, as well as a lathe with what the IDF said was a significant amount of equipment. Also in Zeitoun, Israeli forces eliminated several terrorists inside a tunnel and then destroyed the shaft. In central Gaza, in response to Hamas's rocket fire on Monday, the Israeli Air Force struck an operational centre from which a number of the launches were carried out. *—PTI*

Imran's party to call 'parallel' Punjab session

LAHORE, 27 FEB

Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party plans to call a "parallel" Punjab Assembly session to elect the chief minister, speaker and deputy speaker, claiming that newly-elected chief minister Maryam Nawaz was in the House on "a stolen mandate", a media report said on Tuesday.

Maryam, the 50-year-old senior Vice President of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, made history by becoming the first-ever woman chief minister of Pakistan's most populous Punjab province after receiving 220 votes. She defeated Rana Aftab of 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed Sunni Ittehad Council, who received no votes as his party boycotted the election.

PTI said that newly-elected chief minister Maryam Nawaz was in the House on "a stolen mandate" **PHOTO: ANI**

Former-cricketer-turned-politician Khan's PTI party made a call for a "parallel" Punjab Assembly on Monday after claiming strength of 250 members, including reserved seats for women and minorities, the Dawn newspaper reported. To win the chief minister's election, a candidate needs to win the backing of the majority, which are 187 members in the House that currently has 327 seats.

- Addressing a press conference, PTI's central leader, Shaukat Basra, claimed that more than half of the elected Punjab Assembly members, including the newly elected chief minister Maryam, were in the House on "a stolen mandate"

Addressing a press conference, PTI's central leader, Shaukat Basra, claimed that more than half of the elected Punjab Assembly members, including the newly elected chief minister Maryam, were in the House on "a stolen mandate". *—PTI*

£190M SCANDAL

Pak indicts jailed Imran, his wife in corruption case

ISLAMABAD, 27 FEB

An accountability court in Pakistan on Tuesday indicted jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the 190 million pounds Al Qadir corruption case.

Judge Nasir Javed Rana conducted the hearing at Rawalpindi's high-security Adiala jail where the 72-year-old Pakistan-Tehreek-Insaf founder is currently incarcerated in multiple cases. The judge read the chargesheet in Khan and Bushra's presence in the courtroom.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had initiated an investigation against Khan, his wife, and others regarding the alleged acquisition of hundreds of canals of land under the name of Al Qadir University Trust, resulting in a reported loss of 190 million pounds to the exchequer.

During the hearing, the court said that statements of 58 witnesses will be recorded in the case, Geo News reported. The judge asked Khan if he was guilty or not while framing charges against him. "Why should I read the charge sheet when I know what's written in it?" Khan replied.

Both Khan and his wife then denied the charges against them. The hearing was adjourned till 6 March and the court also ordered five witnesses of NAB to attend the hearing.

The Al-Qadir Trust case pertains to the settlement of 190 million pounds, which the UK's National Crime Agency sent to Pakistan after recovering the amount from Pakistani property tycoon Malik Riaz Hussain.

Hussain, his son Ahmed Ali Riaz, Mirza Shehzad Akbar, and Zulfi Bukhari are also among the suspects in the case, but instead of joining the investigation and subsequent court proceedings, they absconded and were subsequently declared as proclaimed offenders. *—PTI*

The judge read the chargesheet in Khan and Bushra's presence in the courtroom **PHOTO: PTI**

Letter containing white powder sent to Trump Jr's home

MIAMI, 27 FEB

Emergency crews responded Monday after a letter containing an unidentified white powder was sent to the Florida home of Donald Trump Jr, the eldest son of former president and GOP front-runner Donald.

A person familiar with the matter said that results on the substance were inconclusive, but officials do not believe it was deadly. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to confirm details of the letter, which were first reported by The Daily Beast. Trump Jr opened the letter, which also contained a death threat, in his home office, and emergency responders wearing hazmat suits responded.

Jupiter police said the investigation is being handled by the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office, which said it was working with the US Secret Service but didn't have any further details. The Secret Service declined to comment. Trump Jr is one of his father's top campaign surrogates, frequently headlining events and appearing in interviews on his behalf.

A person familiar with the matter said that results on the substance were inconclusive **PHOTO: EPA**

- Trump Jr opened the letter, which also contained a death threat, in his home office, and emergency responders wearing hazmat suits responded

It's the second time white powder has been sent to the former president's oldest son. In 2018, his then-wife, Vanessa, was taken to a New York City hospital after she opened an envelope addressed to her husband that contained an unidentified white powder. Police later said the substance wasn't dangerous. *—AP*

Dengue cases soar: Peru declares health emergency

LIMA, 27 FEB

Peru declared a health emergency in most of its provinces on Monday due to a growing number of dengue cases that are occurring at a time of higher than usual temperatures caused by the El Nino weather pattern.

According to the nation's health ministry, the number of dengue cases registered during the first seven weeks of this year is twice as high as during the same period in 2023 – with more than 31,000 cases recorded.

"This is a grave problem," health minister Cesar Vásquez said last week, before the emergency was declared. "And it is getting out of hand." The health emergency will enable the nation's government to transfer funds faster to the affected regions and also transport doctors and nurses. It will cover 20 of the country's 24 provinces, including regions that surround the capital city of Lima. *—AP*

NZ moves to abolish Maori health authority despite protests

AUCKLAND, 27 FEB

New Zealand's conservative government has introduced a new bill to dismantle an agency set up to improve health outcomes for the Pacific nation's Maori people.

Health Minister Shane Reti said on Tuesday the Maori Health Authority will be shut down by the end of June and that its functions will be absorbed by the national health system. The legislation heralds the "start of a new vision for Maori health", he said.

Known as Te Aka Whai Ora, the Maori Health Authority was established in 2022 to improve the health outcomes of Maori, who make up 17 percent of New Zealand's people and have higher levels of deprivation and imprisonment and worse health outcomes than the broader population.

The move was recommended by a permanent commission, known as the Waitangi Tribunal, which has been hearing claims from Maori since the 1970s and suggesting redress where necessary.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon's centre-right coalition, which took office in October, has promised to undo policies of the previous Labour government, particularly those promoting the official use of the Maori language and seeking to enhance Indigenous living standards and rights. Luxon says his policies are aimed at giving all New Zealanders equal rights. *—Al Jazeera*

CLEARING FINAL OBSTACLES

Hungary ratifies Sweden's NATO bid

BUDAPEST, 27 FEB

Hungary's parliament has voted to ratify Sweden's bid to join NATO, bringing an end to more than 18 months of delays that have frustrated the alliance as it seeks to expand in response to Russia's war on Ukraine. Monday's vote, which passed with 188 members for and six against, was a culmination of months of wrangling by Hungary's allies to persuade its nationalist government to lift its block on Sweden's membership.

The government of Prime Minister Viktor Orban submitted the protocols for approving Sweden's entry into NATO in July 2022, but the matter had stalled in parliament over opposition by governing party lawmakers.

Unanimous support among all NATO members is required to admit new countries **PHOTO: PTI**

Unanimous support among all NATO members is required to admit new countries, and Hungary is the last of the alliance's 31 members to give its backing since Turkey ratified the request last month. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson called it "a historic day". "We stand ready to shoulder our share of the responsibility for NATO's security," Kristersson wrote on X.

"Now that all Allies have approved, Sweden will become the 32nd #NATO Ally," the secretary-general wrote on X. "Sweden's membership will make us all stronger and safer."

Orban, a right-wing populist who has forged close ties with Russia, has said criticism of Hungary's democracy by Swedish politicians had soured relations between the two countries and led to reluctance among lawmakers in his Fidesz party.

But the vote on Monday removed the final membership hurdle for Sweden which, along with neighbouring Finland, first applied to join the alliance in May 2022, just a few months after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. *—Al Jazeera*

BRIT INDIAN TEEN'S MURDER

Family slams UK cops for shoddy probe

LONDON, 27 FEB

The families of British Indian teenager Grace O'Malley Kumar and her friend Barnaby Webber, who were stabbed to death near their university in Nottingham last year, have accused the police of "ongoing mismanagement" in their handling of the case.

The Kumar and Webber families issued a joint statement, reported in the 'Shropshire Star', to say they won't be silenced to ensure urgent changes are made at Nottinghamshire Police.An investigation found 11 members of the force's staff viewed material relating to the case who did not have a legitimate reason to do so. Three faced disciplinary action but eight did not, instead being handed "performance interventions". "We will not be silenced. urgent changes made as this must not happen again to other innocent families," read a statement. The statement was sent because it was of "utmost importance that our serious concerns and ongoing mismanagement by the Nottingham Police are brought to light", the families said. *—PTI*

2 bodies found in search for missing Sydney couple

SYDENY, 27 FEB

Australian police say two bodies have been found during the search for missing Sydney couple Jesse Baird and Luke Davies. "We are very confident that we have located Luke and Jesse," New South Wales (NSW) Police Commissioner Karen Webb said. Beaumont Lamarre-Condon, a police officer who once dated TV presenter Baird, was earlier charged with murder. The bodies were discovered on a rural property in the town of Bungonia. Police said that after initially refusing to cooperate with the investigation, Lamarre-Condon finally disclosed where the two bodies were located on Tuesday morning. Detective Superintendent Daniel Doherty said the remains were found "near the entrance to the property" and that attempts had been made "to cover the bodies with rock and debris". *—BBC News*

Paparazzo accuses Taylor Swift's father of assault

SYDNEY, 27 FEB

Australian police are investigating an allegation by a paparazzo that he was assaulted by Taylor Swift's father. Ben McDonald, 51, accused Scott Swift, 71, of striking his face on a Sydney wharf. He did not need medical help. The confrontation happened on Tuesday after Mr Swift and the pop megastar disembarked from a yacht. A spokesperson for the singer did not address the assault claim but said two people had behaved aggressively towards them, local media reported. A video published by Australian media shows the singer, who is concealed beneath an umbrella, walking with her father and security guards along Neutral Bay Wharf about 02:30 local time (15:30 GMT Monday). Cameras flash before two voices - reported to be a photographer and a guard - accuse each other of touching umbrellas. It is unclear whether the footage captures the alleged incident. *—BBC News*

Police officer and 2 militants killed in shootout in Pak

PESHAWAR, 27 FEB

A senior police officer was killed on Tuesday morning and three others sustained injuries during an intelligence-based operation in northwest Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in which two militants were shot dead. Superintendent of Police Ijaz Khan was killed, while a Deputy Superintendent of Police was injured in the operation conducted in the Mardan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The injured police officials were shifted to a hospital. A counter-terrorism department official said two militants were killed in the exchange of fire in Mardan's Katlang tehsil. One of them, Mohsin Kadir, was a most wanted militant, he said. According to the documents of the Department of Interior and Tribal Affairs of the province, the areas most affected by terrorism included Peshawar, Khyber, Bajaur, and Tank. *—PTI*

Cayman shooting leaves 7 injured at football match

SAN JUAN, 27 FEB

At least seven people were shot at a crowded soccer match in the Cayman Islands and were hospitalized with serious injuries, police said Monday. The shooting that police believe could be gang-related occurred late Sunday in West Bay, located in the northwest point of Grand Cayman island, authorities said. As of late Monday afternoon, four of seven victims were discharged from the hospital, Police Commissioner Kurt Walton said at a press conference. He noted that while the investigation is ongoing, the hypothesis is that a lone shooter opened fire on a small group of people gathered in the stadium's northeast corner, seeking to kill at least two of them. Walton noted that four gangs originally operated in the Cayman Islands: two of them in the capital of George Town and two others in West Bay where the shooting occurred. *—AP*

Gold remains flat at Rs 62,950; silver declines by Rs 400

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Gold prices remained flat at Rs 62,950 per 10g in the national capital on Tuesday, according to HDFC Securities. Silver, however, declined by Rs 400 to Rs 74,200 per kg. In the previous trade, silver ended at Rs 74,600 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading flat at Rs 62,950 per 10 grams, unchanged from the previous close," said Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities, HDFC Securities. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading higher at USD 2,034 per ounce from USD 2,031 per ounce in the previous trade. "Gold prices traded in a choppy range on Tuesday amid mixed global cues. Pullbacks in the US dollar and Treasury yields provided support for gold prices, while expectations of a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war reduced safe haven demand," Gandhi added. —*PTI*

Rupee slips 1 paisa to close at 82.89 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

The rupee closed almost flat at 82.89 (provisional) against the US dollar in a restricted trade on Tuesday amid withdrawal of foreign funds and increased month-end demand for the American currency. According to forex analysts, the Indian currency resisted a sharp fall due to robust equity market sentiment and a weaker dollar even as investors kept an eye on domestic and global macroeconomic data to be released this week. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened firm at 82.87 against the dollar and touched a low of 82.90 in intra-day trade. The local unit finally settled at 82.89 (provisional) against the greenback, down by 1 paisa from the previous closing level. On Monday, the rupee settled 3 paise higher at 82.88 against the US dollar. Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst, LKP Securities, said, the rupee traded slightly weaker with minimal movement, while the dollar index remained flat at around 103.65. —*PTI*

Zydus Lifesciences' Rs 600 cr buyback offer to open on Feb

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

Zydus Lifesciences on Tuesday said its offer to buy back 59.7 lakh shares at Rs 1,005 apiece, aggregating to Rs 600 crore, will open on February 29. The share repurchase programme will close on March 6, 2024, the drug firm said in a regulatory filing. The company proposed to buy back up to 59,70,149 shares at Rs 1,005 apiece for an aggregate consideration not exceeding Rs 600 crore, it stated. Shares of the company were trading 0.38 per cent up at Rs 946.15.—*PTI*

India key to Skoda Auto's global expansion: CEO

PUNE, 27 FEB

India is the most promising growth market for Skoda Auto and the country will play a crucial role in the company's international expansion, the Czech automobile firm's global CEO Klaus Zellmer said on Tuesday. In a virtual address, Zellmer talked about the company's roadmap for India and said Skoda will enter the compact SUV segment in India in a year and also launch its electric vehicle in the market. Skoda Auto India is looking to increase its share in the Indian market to 5 per cent by 2030. "We are continually growing our capacity to respond quickly to the global markets. It is here that India plays crucial role. Europe is important as a core market, but our strategic focus is on growing a new international foundations so that we can stand on two strong legs," Zellmer said. Further, he said, "India is a key contributor to our global growth and the most promising growth market for the years to come. —*PTI*

Markets recover with Sensex gaining 305 pts

Tata Motors, TCS, IndusInd Bank were major gainers

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

Snapping its two-day falling streak, the broader Nifty ended 76.30 points or 0.34 per cent up at 22,198.35 ***PHOTO: X***

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded on Tuesday following buying in index major Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Motors and Sun Pharma amid mostly firm global markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 305.09 points or 0.42 per cent to settle at 73,095.22. The index was hit by volatility in the first half of the session but gains in index heavyweights helped the barometer end two sessions of losses. During the day, the Sensex jumped 371.17 points or 0.50 per cent to a high of 73,161.30.

Snapping its two-day falling streak, the broader Nifty ended 76.30 points or 0.34 per cent up at 22,198.35.

Among the Sensex firms, Tata Motors, Tata Consultancy Services, IndusInd Bank, Power Grid, Bharti Airtel, Sun Pharma, JSW Steel and Tata Steel were the major gainers.

On the other hand, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank and NTPC were among the laggards.

"Markets rebounded from 2-session losses as selective buying in frontline stocks aided recovery from early weakness. There is no major trigger and investors are taking cues from global markets. As we approach F&O expiry day on Thursday, volatility will begin to kick-in as traders will rollover their positions to next expiry day," said Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd.

"The hopes for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war and the drop in crude oil prices supported the sentiment," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.25 per cent and the midcap index dipped 0.10 per cent.

Among the indices, realty jumped 1.02 per cent, consumer durables climbed 1.01 per cent, teck (0.85 per cent), capital goods (0.79 per cent), IT (0.76 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.45 per cent).

Commodities, financial services, telecommunication, utilities and oil & gas were the laggards.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the green while Seoul ended lower.

European markets were traded largely in the green. The US markets ended marginally lower on Monday.

The BSE benchmark fell by 352.67 points or 0.48 per cent to settle at 72,790.13 on Monday. The Nifty declined 90.65 points or 0.41 per cent to 22,122.05.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 285.15 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.16 per cent to USD 82.66 a barrel.—*PTI*

'ALIGN GOALS'

FM asks India Inc to join 'Viksit Bharat' plan

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Nirmala Sitharaman said that India has moved up to become the fifth largest economy ***PHOTO: PTI***

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday exuded confidence that India Inc will align itself to the developmental goals of the nation with an objective of making the country a developed nation or 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 on the 100th anniversary of independence.

Sitharaman said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has clearly indicated that the goal of Viksit Bharat is to be attained to provide the future generations a better India.

Addressing a session on 'Viksit Bharat @ 2047: Viksit Bharat & industry', organised by Ficci, the Minister said that industry's role is critical in achieving the goal by 2047.

She also assured the industry that reforms will continue in the third term of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government.

The new government will be formed after the general elections due in April-May and BJP is confident that Prime Minister Modi will return to power with a greater majority.

Sitharaman said that India has moved up to become the fifth largest economy and is on the way to become the third largest global economy.

Even after Covid, she emphasised that the government showed its commitment by ramping up capital expenditure. Indian industry can now surely move forward with a great speed globally as investments are coming in.

It is time for the Indian industry to also capitalise, she said.

She further said today, without digital infrastructure, no country can move at a pace at which it wants to achieve developmental goals for its own citizens.

India, she said, has shown how making investment in creating the digital infrastructure at the bottom, and scaling it up, led to creation of 'India Stack'.

Sitharaman also told the gathering that the government is focussing on areas like space and artificial intelligence (AI). —*PTI*

NCLT okays Hinduja's revival plan for Reliance Capital

MUMBAI, 27 FEB

- In June 2023, the Hinduja Group firm was selected by the committee for its bid of Rs 9,661 crore upfront cash.

The National Company Law Tribunal on Tuesday approved Hinduja Group firm IndusInd International Holdings' Rs 9,650-crore resolution plan for Reliance Capital.

The Mumbai bench of the NCLT approved the plan submitted by IIHL (IndusInd International Holdings Limited) in June 2023 in the second round of bidding for the debt-laden company.

A detailed order in the matter is expected later in the day.

In November 2021, Reserve Bank had superseded the board of the Reliance Capital on governance issues and payment defaults by the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group company. The central bank had appointed Nageswara Rao Y as the administrator, who invited bids in February 2022 to take over the company.

Reliance Capital had a debt of over Rs 40,000 crore, and four applicants had initially bid with resolution plans. However, the committee of creditors rejected all the four plans for lower bid values and a challenge mechanism was initiated where IIHL and Torrent Investments participated.

In June 2023, the Hinduja Group firm was selected by the committee for its bid of Rs 9,661 crore upfront cash. Reliance Capital's cash balance of an additional Rs 500 crore would also go to the lenders. —*PTI*

Paytm shares hit 5% fresh upper circuit

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Shares of One97 Communications had hit upper circuit limits on Monday and Friday as well

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, the owner of the Paytm brand, jumped another 5 per cent on Tuesday to hit the highest trading permissible limit for the day.

The stock climbed 4.98 per cent to Rs 449.30 -- its upper circuit limit -- on the BSE even after a muted opening to the trade. Shares of the fintech firm exhibited highly volatile trends falling to the day's low of Rs 413.55. Later, the stock bounced back and quoted 1.18 per cent higher at Rs 433.

At the NSE, shares of the company rallied 4.99 per cent to reach the highest trading permissible limit for the day at Rs 449.50 despite a weak beginning.

Shares of One97 Communications had hit upper circuit limits on Monday and Friday as well.

Vijay Shekhar Sharma has stepped down as part-time non-executive Chairman of Paytm Payments Bank Limited and the board of the bank has been reconstituted, a filing said on Monday, adding PPBL will commence the process of appointing a new chairman. The dramatic turn of events assumes significance in the backdrop of RBI's crackdown on the Paytm Payments Bank over persistent non-compliance and continued material supervisory concerns. Last month, in a regulatory action the central bank barred PPBL from accepting fresh deposits or top-ups in customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments after February 29 -- a deadline that was later extended to 15 March. In a release on Monday, One97 Communications informed that its associate entity Paytm Payments Bank Limited has reconstituted its Board of Directors with the appointment of former chairman of Central Bank of India Srinivasan Sridhar. —*PTI*

China-linked loan apps under govt lens

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

PHOTO: PIXABAY

The Corporate Affairs Ministry is probing various Chinese companies, especially those with links to loan apps, for alleged violations and the investigations are at an advanced stage, a senior official said.

In recent times, Indian authorities have been cracking down on entities that are operating loan apps illegally and the ministry has also been acting against companies and related individuals for hiding beneficial ownership.

The senior official told PTI that enquiries by the ministry are going on against various Chinese companies, especially those linked to loan apps, and some of the enquiries are at an advanced stage. The ministry, which is implementing the companies law, is mainly looking at whether frauds have been committed at these companies and some of the cases are being probed by the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO), the official said.

Further, the official said that the ministry receives complaints from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), among other entities, following which enquiries are initiated against the companies concerned. While it is difficult sometimes to track the funding sources for some companies, the official said efforts are made to ascertain the beneficial ownership. In January, the Registrar of Companies (RoC), NCT (National Capital Territory) of Delhi, and Haryana slapped penalties totalling more than Rs 21 lakh on an Indian company and its related individuals as well as entities. —*ANI*

JAPAN-HYD TIE UP

Firms work on dengue vaccine

HYDERABAD, 27 FEB

Biological E will scale up its production capacity to potentially reach 50 million doses annually ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Japanese drug firm Takeda on Tuesday said it has tied up with Hyderabad-based firm Biological E Ltd to manufacture its dengue vaccine.

The partnership marks a crucial step in the fight against the global public health threat of dengue fever, aligning with the disease-specific target set by the World Health Organisation to achieve zero case-fatality rate due to dengue by 2030, the company said in a statement.

The partnership will substantially enhance manufacturing capabilities to ensure a sustainable global supply of the vaccine, it added.

Biological E will scale up its production capacity to potentially reach 50 million doses annually, accelerating Takeda's efforts to manufacture 100 million doses annually within the decade, it said.

Together, the entities will help combat dengue on a global scale by significantly increasing manufacturing capacity for multi-dose vials of TAK-003 (vaccine) to drive sustainable access in more endemic countries. —*PTI*

Telangana to expand 'Genome Valley'

HYDERABAD, 27 FEB

Telangana will be taking up the next phase of 'Genome Valley', the country's first organised cluster for Life Sciences R&D with an investment of Rs 2,000 crore in 300 acres, Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said.

Speaking at BioAsia 2024, a healthcare and life sciences annual event, Reddy said the government is also planning to develop ten "Pharma Villages" in the state which will have investment potential of Rs one lakh crore.

"I am announcing here to establish the next phase of Genome Valley in 300 acres of land with Rs 2,000 crore of investment," he added.

He further said the Pharma Villages will have the potential to generate five lakh jobs after they are established.

Reddy said the government has also identified clusters for Greenfield Integrated Pharma Villages in Vikarabad, Medak and Nalgonda, all three different areas of Telangana for infrastructure and investment.

According to him, the state government attracted over Rs 40,000 crore investments in the recently held World Economic Forum Summit in Davos, Switzerland.

Telangana Industries Minister D Sridhar Babu said the state government will soon come out with a Lifesciences Policy. —*ANI*

'Indian apparel industry weak in synthetic fabrics'

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

The developed countries are buying clothing made up of mixed synthetics and the Indian apparel industry is weak on that front, leading to a decline in global exports share, a report by GTRI said on Tuesday.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that due to weak synthetics, India's apparel industry is a horse running with one leg tied.

"The results are low exports, low wages, and low investments in the sector," it said, adding that synthetics have overtaken cotton and become favourite of the fashion industry.

"Seventy per cent of clothing bought by developed countries is made of mixed synthetics. Their share in Indian exports is less than 40 per cent and this is the key reason for India's weak garment exports, the report said.

It added that today, most formal, sports and fashion wear uses synthetic fabrics.

They are durable, do not fade, and can have any colour besides easy blending with wool, cotton, or rubber allows experimentation.

Explaining it further, the report said that globally cotton dominates spring and summer sales seasons, while synthetics and blends dominate autumn and winter seasons.

—*PTI*

AMID GMAIL SHUTDOWN RUMOURS

Musk to take on Gmail with new Xmail service

SAN FRANCISCO, 27 FEB

As the furore over a hoax email purporting to come from Google and detailing how Gmail was to supposedly be closed down on 1 August starts to evaporate, Elon Musk just added fuel to the fire by claiming to be developing a new email service called Xmail.

No, Gmail isn't closing down on 1 August

Despite the viral message about Google shutting down the Gmail email service this summer, that's not going to happen. As Forbes reported on 23 February, the message was nothing more than a realistic-looking fake. It was posted to X (formerly known as Twitter) with the headline that Google is sunsetting Gmail, which was enough to fool lots of people, it has to be said.

Xmail is coming, says Musk

Now another message has been posted to X, this time from the owner and richest person on the planet, Musk, which has also got people talking. In fact, the message was a reply to a question tweeted by X security engineer Nate McGrady that asked when the company would be developing Xmail. Musk was quick to respond with two words: It's coming.

Elon Musk's will likely assess the response from the people over Xmail announcement ***PHOTO: ANI***

When is Xmail coming?

Of course, in true Musk fashion, those two words say both a lot and nothing at all simultaneously. His response would appear to be a case of throwing an idea out there and seeing what the response from the masses is.

Forbes reached out to X in order to see if it can provide any further information.

Security risks ff Musk's Xmail announcement

Given the fact that the hype around the viral Gmail closure message is still swirling around, Forbes would advise caution about responding to any messages on any platform that relate to your Gmail account or further information about closures. The same advice goes for messages concerning Musk's Xmail. It's likely cybercriminals will seize the opportunity to exploit confusion and distribute phishing messages with malicious intent.

—*Courtesy, Forbes*

Musk slams Windows 11 over registration

LOS ANGELES, 27 FEB

Elon Musk dropped a complaint about his new laptop, which he said required him to register a Microsoft account to use it.

"Just bought a new PC laptop and it won't let me use it unless I create a Microsoft account, which also means giving their AI access to my computer!" wrote Musk. "This is messed up. There used to be an option to skip signing into or creating a Microsoft account."

Soon, however, a Community Note was added to the post, stating that he was incorrect. The Community Notes feature on X is a fact-checking tool that allows authors to give context to potentially misleading posts.

"It is still possible to set up the latest version of Windows without a Microsoft account," read the note. Community Notes is intended to operate through crowdsourcing. Anyone who has been using X for more than six months has not recently broken its rules and has a verified phone number is eligible to participate in the programme as a contributor. He also indicated that Microsoft can turn off your computer, writing, "But since they now require that you use their services just to use your computer, @Microsoft can effectively shut off your computer!"

—*ANI*

PHOTO: AFP

Shami undergoes ankle surgery, set to miss IPL

LONDON, 27 FEB

Senior India pacer Mohammed Shami has undergone a surgery on his left achilles tendon, which rules him out of next month's Indian Premier League and possibly the T20 World Cup in June. The 33-year-old, who last played for India in the ODI World Cup final against Australia on 19 November, went under the knife in London on Monday. Shami, who is eager to "get back on my feet soon" stares at a recovery time of a minimum of three months.He will thus miss the IPL slated to be played from March 22 to May 26, as reported by PTI last week.Shami is also a doubtful starter for the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and USA. "Just had a successful heel operation on my achilles tendon! Recovery is going to take some time.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Long-serving Hockey India CEO Elena resigns

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Fresh turmoil hit Hockey India on Tuesday when its long-serving CEO Elena Norman resigned from her position, alleging that her remuneration was held back for a prolonged period and the job itself was made "difficult" by rampant factionalism in the body. The Australian held the post for nearly 13 years and had not been paid for the last three months, according to sources in HI. "There were some issues (regarding salary) and after much persuasion, that got cleared last week," Norman told PTI after HI issued a statement announcing her exit without specifying any reasons.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Is Anthony Kim returning after 12 years to LIV?

RIYADH, 27 FEB

All signs point toward Anthony Kim ending his 12-year absence by playing the LIV Golf event in Saudi Arabia, with the latest indication a video tease from Greg Norman on Monday. Kim was a raw talent who broke the country club image in golf with his belt buckles and bling, winning three times on the PGA Tour and playing in one Ryder Cup in 2008 at Valhalla, where he secured a spirited win over Sergio Garcia. He rose as high as No. 6 in the world.The 30-second clip on X showed vague images of Kim, now 38, accompanied by Norman posting, "He oozes incredible talent. —*AP*

South Korea picks Hwang Sun-hong as interim coach

SEOUL, 27 FEB

The Korea Football Association (KFA) said on Tuesday it has picked Hwang Sun-hong, coach of the under-23 team, as temporary head coach of the national side to prepare for the upcoming 2026 World Cup qualifiers. The National Team Committee, a KFA advisory body, had been looking for a replacement after sacking Juergen Klinsmann in the wake of the national side's semi-final exit at the Asian Cup and amid criticism of his leadership.—*AP*

Jarrod hits treble as West Ham sink Brentford

Bowen completed the first hat-trick of his career

RANCHI, 27 FEB

Jarrod Bowen ended his goal drought with a hat-trick as West Ham beat struggling Brentford 4-2 to secure their first win in nine games on Monday. Bowen hadn't scored in the Premier League since 23 December, but the England forward got back on track with a stylish treble at the London Stadium. The 27-year-old struck twice in the first seven minutes before Neal Maupay got one back for Brentford in a frantic opening 13 minutes.

Bowen completed the first hat-trick of his career after the interval before Emerson's superb long-range blast made it four.

Yoane Wissa reduced the deficit late on, but David Moyes' side were able to celebrate their first victory since winning at Arsenal on 28 December.

Ending their longest winless streak in all competitions since 1997 was essential for Moyes, who has come under fire from frustrated fans in recent weeks. Moyes is yet to decide whether to accept the club's offer of a new contract, with his present deal expiring at the end of this season.

After losing their last three league games, including a 6-0 embarrassment against Arsenal, and crashing out of the FA Cup at second-tier Bristol City, West Ham's climb to eighth place was a welcome boost for the beleaguered boss.

"We needed to get three points. We played in a much more aggressive fashion tonight," Moyes said. "Jarrod was back to his best. He started the season well, then got injured. If he keeps scoring he'll be in that England squad for the Euros."

On his future, Moyes added: "The big thing for me is to see what happens until the end of the season. I've enjoyed it here."

Relegation-threatened Brentford had slipped down a place before kicking a ball on Monday after Everton's punishment for breaching Premier League financial rules was reduced from 10 points to six after an appeal.

Brentford have now lost five of their last six league games and sit below Everton in 16th place, five points above the relegation zone.

Asked about Brentford's perilous position at the table, boss Thomas Frank said: "I'm unbelievably irritated with our performance so that's my only focus.

"It's two steps back again. It's an inconsistent season so far." —*AP*

West Ham United's English striker #20 Jarrod Bowen celebrates scoring the team's second goal during the English Premier League **PHOTO: AFP**

- Jarrod Bowen ended his goal drought with a hat-trick as West Ham beat struggling Brentford 4-2 to secure their first win in nine games on Monday. Bowen hadn't scored in the Premier League since 23 December

WOMEN'S GOLD CUP

USWNT falls to Mexico for 1st time in 14 years at Gold Cup **PHOTO: AFP**

US falls to Mexico for the second time ever

CARSON, 27 FEB

Mexico beat the United States for the second time ever, getting goals from Lizbeth Ovalle and Mayra Pelayo for a 2-0 victory Monday night in the CONCACAF Women's Gold Cup.

USWNT falls to Mexico for 1st time in 14 years at Gold Cup. The U.S. entered the game 40-1-1 against its rival, with its only previous loss a 2-1 decision during Women's World Cup qualifying in 2010.

It was the first loss for the U.S. under interim coach Twila Kilgore, who took over after the team's dramatic exit from the Women's World Cup last summer in the round of 16. Emma Hayes will take over for Kilgore this spring.

Mexico, which failed to qualify for last year's World Cup, finished atop Group A in the Gold Cup while the United States finished second.

Both teams advanced to the knockout round.

Ovalle, who plays for Tigres of Monterrey, put Mexico ahead in the 28th minute.

—*AP*

RCB beat GG by 8 wickets in WPL

BENGALURU, 27 FEB

A clinical all-around show helped Royal Challengers Bangalore beat Gujarat Giants by eight wickets in their Women's Premier League match here on Tuesday.

Opting to field, RCB restricted Gujarat to a lowly 107 for 7 and then overhauled the target with ease, scoring 110 for 2 in 12.3 overs at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Skipper Smriti Mandhana hit a 27-ball 43, while Sabbhineni Meghana (36) and Ellyse Perry (23) also chipped in with the bat to complement the bowling efforts of pacer Renuka Singh (2/14) and left-arm spinner Sophie Molineux (3/25).

Smriti Mandhana **PHOTO: PTI**

Brief scores:

Gujarat Giants: 107 for 7 in 20 overs (Dayalan Hemalatha 31, Sophie Molineux 3/25).

Royal Challengers Bangalore: 110 for 2 in 12.3 overs (Smriti Mandhana 43; Ashleigh Gardner 1/15, Tanuja Kanwar 1/20). —*PTI*

KIUG: Gowtham, Jyoti and Amandeep break Games records

GUWAHATI, 27 FEB

Pole vaulter M Gowtham of the University of Madras, javelin thrower Jyoti of Chaudhary Devi Lal University and middle-distance runner Amandeep Kaur of Panjab University set new Games records to light up the last day of athletics action in the Khelo India University Games here on Tuesday.

Elsewhere in Aizawl, Ashif PA scored the winner in the 85th minute to help the University of Calicut beat the University of Kerala 2-1 to win the men's football gold.

Ananthu had put the winners ahead in the second minute but Jijo Jaison restored parity 20 minutes later, following which both teams played cautious football till Ashif broke the deadlock.

Annamalai University clinched the women's team gold, beating Guru Nanak Dev University in a tie-break 3-2 after both the teams were locked at 0-0 at full time at the Nehru Stadium in Guwahati.

With two more days of competition left, Chandigarh University continues to lead the medals tally with 24 gold, 16 silver, and 16 bronze.

Lovely Professional University is second with 13 gold, 12 silver, and 3 bronze while Guru Nanak Dev University moved up to the third spot with 10 gold, 14 silver, and 13 bronze.

But it was the track and field athletes from other universities that stole the show on Tuesday. —*PTI*

BCCI Ranji diktat is potential savior: Rohit

Rohit Sharma says only those showing hunger will be given chances to play Test cricket for India **PHOTO: BCCI**

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

India skipper Rohit Sharma's assertion that Test opportunities should be only for those who show hunger for the format found resonance with state associations grappling with youngsters desperate to make a name in white-ball cricket but reluctant to grind it out in first-class games.

With the advent of IPL, the club vs country debate has been raging for years now and Rohit's stern statement came at a time when two established names in Indian cricket Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan ignored a BCCI diktat to play Ranji Trophy quarter-finals, focussing instead on their IPL preparations.

"Jin logon ko bhookh hai, hum unhi logon ko mauka denge (We will give opportunities to only those who are hungry)," Rohit declared on Monday after a series-clinching win over England in the fourth Test in Ranchi.

"Agar hunger nahi hai to unko khila ke koi matlab nahi hai (There's no point in playing those who don't have the hunger)," he said.

The hunger that he spoke about was there for everyone to see in young guns like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Akash Deep and the more established Shubman Gill, all of whom sparkled at various stages of the series against England.

But Rohit did make a point about the unnamed ones who don't seem to have that fire in the belly.

"I complement BCCI for this decision of compelling players to play for their state in the Ranji Trophy. I see it as a case of better late than never, this is going to help domestic cricket in a big way," said Khandekar. —*PTI*

WE DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE IN HELL AGAINST INDIA: STOKES

RANCHI, 27 FEB

Ben Stokes **PHOTO: AFP**

Skipper Ben Stokes expressed pride in how England has fought toe to toe with India despite not having "a chance in hell of competing" with the hosts in the ongoing series.

India registered a five-wicket win in the fourth and penultimate Test to take an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match series against England, who suffered their first Test series defeat under the leadership of captain Stokes and head coach Brendon McCullum. —*PTI*

INDIA VS ENG 4TH TEST: INDIA EXTENDS LEAD TO 2ND PLACE

ICC WORLD TEST CHAMPIONSHIP 2023-25

POINTS TABLE

	TEAMS	M	W	L	D	PT	PCT	PEN.
1	NEW ZEALAND	4	3	1	0	36	75.00	0
2	INDIA	8	5	2	1	62	64.58	-2
3	AUSTRALIA	10	6	3	1	66	55.00	-10
4	BANGLADESH	2	1	1	0	12	50.00	0
5	PAKISTAN	5	2	3	0	22	36.33	-2
6	WEST INDIES	4	1	2	1	16	33.33	0
7	SOUTH AFRICA	4	1	3	0	12	25.00	0
8	ENGLAND	9	3	5	1	21	19.44	-19
9	SRI LANKA	2	0	2	0	0	0.00	0

Namibia's Loftie-Eaton smashes fastest T20I century

KIRTIPUR, 27 FEB

Loftie-Eaton **PHOTO: AFP**

Namibia's Jan Nicol Loftie-Eaton smashed the fastest century in T20I history, achieving the feat off just 33 deliveries against Nepal in the opening match of the Tri-Nation series here on Tuesday.

The middle-order batter bettered the record of Nepal's Kushal Malla by just one delivery. Malla had achieved the feat during the Hangzhou Asian Games last year when his side had posted a world-record total of 314/3 against Mongolia.

Loftie-Eaton played a knock of 101 off just 36 deliveries, which included 11 fours and eight sixes at an amazing strike rate of 280.55.

The left-handed batter scored 92 runs in boundaries. The 22-year-old has played 33 T20Is and 36 ODIs so far, with this being his maiden century across formats.

The visitors posted 206/4 Dipendra Singh Airee (48) was Nepal's top scorer.

The Netherlands is the third team in the fray. —*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Vidarbha crush Karnataka by 128 runs

NAGPUR, 27 FEB

Vidarbha completed a 128-run hammering of Karnataka to cruise to the Ranji Trophy semifinal, riding on splendid four-wicket hauls by Harsh Dubey and Aditya Sarwate here on Tuesday.

It was a memorable win for the hosts here at the VCA Stadium at Civil Lines as Vidarbha came from behind on the final day to stop Karnataka in their tracks with a flurry of wickets.

Chasing a massive 371 to win, Karnataka had laid the foundation when they closed at 103 for one at stumps on the fourth day, but a spectacular batting collapse on the fifth day morning undid all their hard work. Inside the first hour's play, Karnataka lost the fulcrum of their batting unit including skipper Mayank Agarwal (70), Nikin Jose (0), and Manish Pandey (1) in a short span, with Sarwate (22-0-78-4) accounting for each of them. Aneesh had added 40 runs for the sixth wicket with Hardik Raj (13) to lead the recovery. Karnataka was shot out for 243 in pursuit of 371 and thus crashed out of the race to the semifinals. Vidarbha has joined Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the semifinal round.

Brief scores: Vidarbha 460 & 196 beat Karnataka 286 & 243 in 62.4 overs (R Samarth 40, Mayank 70, Aneesh 40; Harsh Dubey 4/65, Aditya Sarwate 4/78) by 128 runs. —*PTI*

WRESTLING FEDERATION OF INDIA

Singh invites wrestlers to appear for national trials

NEW DELHI, 27 FEB

Suspended Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Sanjay Singh invited Olympic medalist Bajrang Punia, World Championship medalist Vinesh Phogat, and retired wrestler Sakshi Malik to compete in national trials in March to decide the team for Asian competitions, including the 2024 Paris Games Qualifiers in Kyrgyzstan.

WFI also announced the dates to hold selection trials for an Olympic qualifying event for Paris 2024, as well as the senior Asian championships - both scheduled to take place in April in Kyrgyzstan.

The Wrestling Federation of India announced the trials on March 10-11, including the names of star grapplers Bajrang (65kg freestyle), Vinesh (55kg), and Sakshi (62kg), who declared her retirement from the sport on the day Sanjay Singh was elected president.

"I would like to inform all affiliated units of the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) that the selection trials to select the teams for participation in the following events are being conducted on 10th and 11th March 2024 at K.D. Jadhav Wrestling Indoor Stadium, IGI Sports Complex, New Delhi," said Sanjay Singh in a statement.

According to the announcement, the trials are being held to determine teams for the Senior Asian Wrestling Championship in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) from April 11 to 16 April, as well as the Asian Olympic Games Qualifier Tournament at the same location from 19 April to 21 April. —*ANI*

Olympic medalist Bajrang Punia, World Championship medalist Vinesh Phogat **PHOTO: PTI**

- Suspended Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Sanjay Singh invited Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, and retired wrestler Sakshi Malik to compete in national trials in March to decide the team for Asian competitions, including the 2024 Paris Games Qualifiers in Kyrgyzstan.

Sanjay Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

India finish runners-up in the Turkish Women's Cup

ALANYA, 27 FEB

India's hopes of winning their first-ever senior title outside the SAFF region were dashed by an injury-time goal by lower-ranked Kosovo in their concluding round-robin Turkish Women's Cup match here on Tuesday.

While the 1-0 victory, thanks to a strike by Erëleta Memeti (90+2'), propelled 100-ranked Kosovo to nine points from three matches and gave them their second title in a row, India, placed 35 spots above their opponents in the FIFA chart, finished runners-up with six points.

It was the Blue Tigresses' best performance in the tournament in three appearances.

India's Manisha Kalyan was adjudged the best midfielder of the tournament for her exemplary display throughout the competition.

It was a do-or-die match for India. For Kosovo, a team, that last tasted defeat in November 2022 (1-3 against Slovenia), a draw was enough, though they did even better.

—*AP*